Case Study – Women and Violence Programme in Colombia

Draft April 2012

This document gathers the experiences of the Women and Violence Programme in Colombia in exploring innovative M&E systems based on qualitative methodologies. This initiative was taken up as one of 11 pilot cases in a Thematic Learning Programme (TLP): *Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation of Complex Social Change Processes – Research-Action concerning qualitative methods for PM&E*, developed by PSO in cooperation with the University of Leuven.

I.   Preparation of the PME pilot

Background and Cordaid's motivation for choosing the Women and Violence Programme for a TLP pilot case

Cordaid is interested in developing a methodology for the monitoring and evaluation of complex multi-stakeholder processes. Cordaid launched the concept of Communities of Change as a component of its 2011-2015 strategic planning exercise. A community of change consists of a group of people, networks and organizations who collaborate towards a specific social change objective. A Community of Change has several levels of involvement of stakeholders. A core element of these CoC's is the concept of Core Group (CG), which is a cluster of organisations, networks, institutions and/or individuals that work in a coherent way towards a common social change agenda.

Beyond the common agenda that binds a CG together, each member of the CG, for its own part, can mobilise other agendas and have other specific interests that might be divergent. Their contribution to the CG consists of their specific abilities, areas in which they enjoy special skills, resources, knowledge and powers. If one is able to combine all these elements, a strong driving force for change can be established.

Cordaid's current monitoring system is based on preset indicators and quantitative data, since it has to aggregate indicators in certain result areas for the reporting to its backdonors, such as the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Partners report on the progress of their projects through narrative and financial reports. In the case of a Community of Change, Cordaid supports a process of a group of actors, not only financially but also through capacity building, linking and learning and lobby and advocacy. This requires a completely different approach for PME. Therefore Cordaid started this pilot with the following objectives:

- Clarifying how strategies of different stakeholders in a given context are interrelated and how they reinforce each other;
- Understanding the process in a CoC towards a common agenda, collaborated action and mutual trust;
- Encouraging ownership of the monitoring process by the stakeholders in the CoC;
- Learning from this experience and be better equipped to develop monitoring policies for other CoC's;
- Understanding the different roles of stakeholders and Cordaid in a certain context.

Cordaid chose the Women and Violence Programme in Colombia for this pilot because it has become a model programme that deepens the understanding of Communities of Change. Therefore, it is an interesting case from which one may learn about the implementation of new approaches to M&E. This makes it possible to take into account the complex nature of social change processes, while at the same time strengthens the programme as such and also other Communities of Change that receive Cordaid's support.

Description of the Women and Violence Programme in Colombia

The 'Women and Violence' program supports about 40 networks of individuals, CBOs nd NGOs in 8 regions. The organizations are engaged in various development issues at the local level. According to their individual needs they form regional networks that are engaged to a regional change agenda and seek strategic allies at that level. Again the regions are linked to the overall national level where decisions are made on a common change agenda. The common agenda has been laid down in a National Advocacy Plan that is reviewed and adjusted every year. This plan guides the design of the Regional Action Plans and some of the actions carried out by the networks and organisations that are linked to the programme at a local level.

Colombia is a very big country and the program is active at various levels in different regional contexts. Some networks are working in a situation of direct conflict, others in situations of political instability or under constant threat from armed groups and facing growing attacks because of their work as women human rights defenders.

The vision of the organisations and networks that are linked to the programme is "to contribute to reconstructing and strengthening the social fabric in Colombia, to developing peace initiatives brought forward by women, and to eliminating violence against women in all its forms, which makes it possible for them to fully enjoy their human rights"[1].

To achieve this vision, the wager lies on strengthening the movement of women as political actors of change. This allows them to demand their rights through public political advocacy processes, to gain the recognition and integration of women's perspectives in peace negotiations, and to contribute to give new meaning to some of the patriarchal cultural beliefs and to the use of violence against women as an instrument of domination in a situation of conflict.

The programme rests on a supporting structure made up of: a facilitator; a steering committee; and a representative from each of the regions linked to the programme.

The CoC, and particularly the CG of the Women and Violence program is not static in time, in much the same way that change is continuously occurring in a give context, the members of the CG also go through changes. This may result in some aspects of the common agenda changing within short periods of time, although the longer term objectives are not modified. It may also happen that new actors become involved in the CG, or that some of its members leave.

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[1] "Programa Mujeres y Violencias" (Women and Violence Programme). Cordaid Colombia, Synergia Foundation. Bogota, Colombia. 2009. Page: 15.

Figure 1. Structure of the Programme
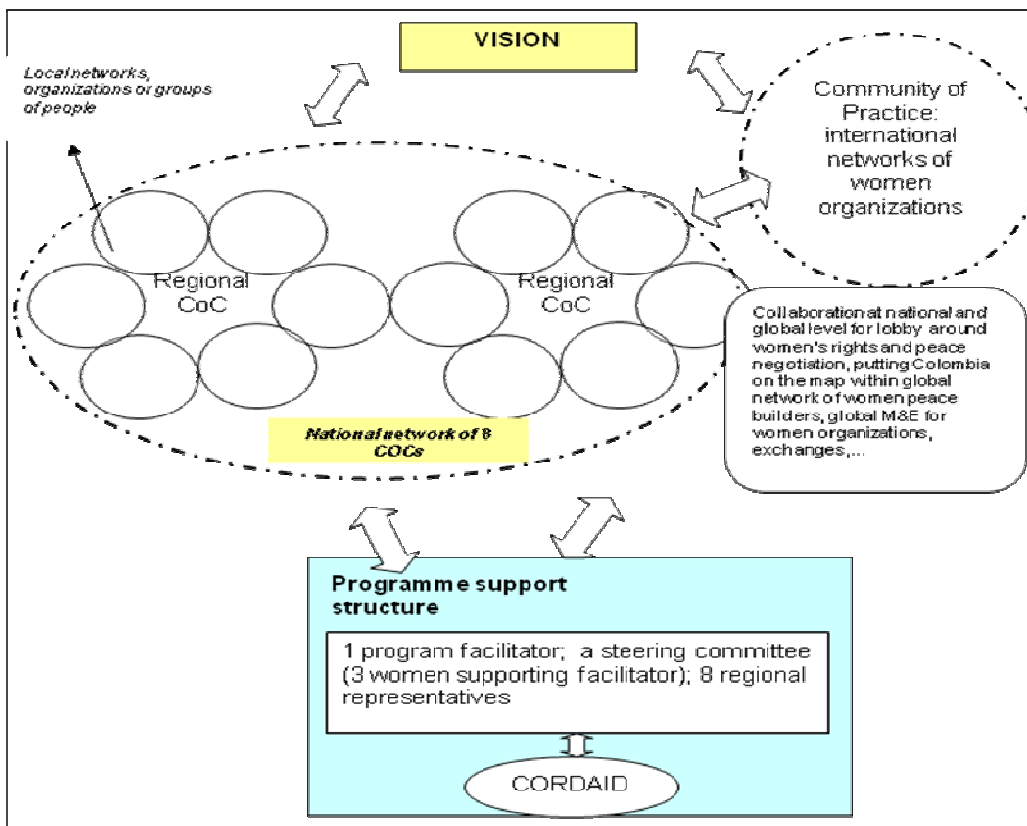
Motivation of the programme for participating in the TLP

*"We've always, always worked
with incomplete evaluation,
but now we're a Community of Change
through monitoring the country will experience transformation".[2]*

Cordaid took the initiative of linking the WVP to the TLP. Her aim was to design and set up a M&E system that would serve the learning interests of women, while playing a leading role in its design in order to enhance their sense of ownership and its actual implementation.

The timing was right. After four years of networking and collaboration, the women mentioned that they are ready to implement a more structured way of working, to improve their strategies, reflect on the program and strengthen their network.

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[2] Written by the women of the Caribe region, referring to their experiences with M&E.

Some reflections on the process

Cordaid did not start this pilot with the idea to test a predefined methodology, such as outcome mapping. Instead it was given to the participants in the pilot (members of the Community of Change and the consultants) to select and build the most useful, practical and relevant PME approach. We think this has benefited the pilot very much.

There was no discussion within Cordaid on whether this PME approach might or might not fit into the indicators Cordaid uses for the monitoring of its programs (indicators entirely based on the role of Cordaid in the countries).We are not imposing our indicators as a requirement for the monitoring by the partner organisations. Right now this limits the possibilities for Cordaid to measure progress based on our set indicators for the global Women and Violence program. However our larger aim is to re-position M&E as part of our politics and as a means of advancing collective learning. Cordaid is repositioning herself from merely a funder towards an actor in the Community of Change. This is an advantage to make monitoring more relevant to the partners themselves as well as to Cordaid.

II.   Developing the PM&E System and M&E in Action

"Monitoring and evaluation,
when done with discipline and dedication,
are the perfect pair
leading to true intervention
that guarantees a successful revolution".[3]

 With the endorsement of the organisations and networks linked to the programme, Cordaid and the coordinating body of the Programme decided to participate in this initiative concerning Research-Action, and to establish a PM&E system for the programme. This entails two phases: i. Design and pilot phase carried out from July, 2010 to April, 2011; and, ii. the institutionalization phase currently under development that started on June 2011 and to be finalized on July 2012.

These two phases are finalized in the design of a PM&E system for the Community of Change which involves four components:
i.   An actor oriented planning component;
ii.   A self M&E component currently under implementation in its first complete cycle by the local networks and M&E coordinators at the local, regional and national level;
iii.   An online interactive information system facilitating information flows and facilitating communication and interaction amongst the core group members; and,
iv.   An external evaluation component to be developed by Cordaid or by the Programme as required in the future. These components are briefly described in section III. The design of the PM&E system was not based

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[3] Written by the women of the Caribe region, referring to their experiences with M&E.

on a linear process. The planning, implementation and reviewing of its structure and operation took place simultaneously, incorporating emerging issues and reflective learning.

The complexity and sheer size of the programme which comprises eight regions with different political contexts and a diversity of stakeholders, made it necessary to design and validate a first version of the M&E system in two pilot regions (Caribe and Santander). Later, during the Institutionalization Phase, further fine-tuning of the PM&E structure and operation took place according to the pilot phase lessons learnt, and three new regions were integrated to the PM&E system (Valle, Antioquia and Chocó). To address the particularities of some of the women networks involved and regional contexts, some adaptations were needed and support was provided for the local networks in each region to adjust the M&E model to the local context.

For designing, adjusting and implementing the PM&E system, some principles and steps proposed by Michael Quinn Patton in his books *Utilization-Focused Evaluation and Developmental Evaluation*[4] were adopted. Priority was given to what was useful to monitor and evaluate, according to the learning and decision making needs of the women involved and the programme supporting group. Therefore enhancing ownership, the women's involvement, as well as the use of the M&E findings, lessons learnt and outputs for programme development.

The programme coordinator, representatives of the local networks and NGO's linked to the core group of the Community of Change in each region actively participated in the design, for which roles and responsibilities were clearly defined. One M&E facilitator per network and two M&E coordinators per region were selected to guarantee that the local networks learning interests and views were considered in the overall process, as well as to support the implementation of the PM&E system at the different levels in which the programme operates. However their PM&E capacities and facilitation skills were weak or nonexistent; therefore building these capacities for them to be able to fulfil their roles was a prerequisite.

The original programme planning procedures were quite general and, highly output and activity oriented. Therefore, the policy influence pathways guiding their policy work were weakly structured but motivated by the political activism, quite common in social movements. Furthermore, it was not a felt need to adopt planning approaches more coherent with the nature of the Community of Change agenda. Therefore, this experience focused initially on the M&E components, adopting a retrospective learning approach, as a means to verify if their original planning model proves to be appropriate for their Community of Change work. The planning model was adjusted in the pilot phase, based on the outcomes, the nature of the different contexts in which they operate, and a deeper understanding of the different pathways of change used by the local networks. More details on the planning model are shared in section II.B. Guidelines for an actor-oriented planning.

This PM&E trial emphasise fomenting on the women involved, an evaluative thinking and questioning of planned and unanticipated outcomes, as well as reflecting on actors towards which meaningful efforts to influence them have been done, but it was not possible to influence their behaviour. It also promotes reflection around how women networks and organizations are articulated as the CoC core group and around their networking practices. Rather to lodging accountability in adherence to a fix model with fix outcomes, they lodged it in learning and adaptability, for showing their peers, the programme supporting team and donors,

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[4] Michael Quinn Patton Utilization-Focused Evaluation (1977), and Developmental Evaluation (2011).

what they are learning from M&E and the effects of those learning's on their networking practices, and on the progress to achieve desired outcomes.

II.A. The Design and Pilot Phase

"Six long days
we had to endure,
but after the results
we wanted to learn more".

The design and pilot phase started with the identification of the M&E aspects, explained below, in a workshop with representatives of both pilot regions and the programme coordinator, later tested in workshops. Their experiences were shared in a meeting of representatives of the two regions and an adjustment of the PM&E system was done which was further shared and approved by the women of other regions during the Programme's Annual National Meeting in March 2011.

M&E Purposes and Learning Questions

Currently the networks are using M&E findings and knowledge outputs to: adjust the programme strategy; improve their networks structures and functioning; strengthening networking; accountability by showing donors and their peers what they were learning from M&E and the effects of those learning on progress to achieve desired outcomes; and, to improve women policy influence capacity and practices. It is expected that once the self-M&E process is fully institutionalized and the CoC core group members M&E capacity is enhanced, they will start to take advantage of the full potential of the PM&E system for programme outreach, operation and development.

M&E purposes were identified, based both on the local networks and the programme interests learning needs. No tensions between the networks and programme interests were found to define the learning purposes, as the programme is built on the networks ongoing work, their interests seems to be harmonized.

Relevant M&E questions were identified for each M&E purpose. Initially too many questions were identified, that were reduced as the women experienced the challenges that implied answering them in terms of technical capacities, time and resources available. The approach of answering generic learning questions based on the principles underlying the programme and the CoC, provides the necessary flexibility for the M&E system to keep its relevance regardless of the changes on the themes and purposes agreed on a yearly basis in the National Advocacy Plan. It also makes it possible for the different regions and networks to answer the questions from their own level of articulation to the common agenda, while it makes their contributions visible according to their capabilities, knowledge, the particularities of their articulation processes and characteristics of the contexts in which they operate.

Table 1. M&E purposes and learning questions

M&E Purposes	M&E learning questions
a. Gain a deeper understanding of political advocacy processes in order to improve the effectiveness of the networks and organisations linked to the programme, in contributing to a common agenda	• What behavioral changes in key actors (intended and unintended), have been achieved, which not, and why? Which actors that we have influenced have not changed and why? • How the networks and organizations linked to the core group went about influencing or supporting those behavioral changes? Which actions/practices were more effective, which less effective and why? Are there emerging patterns in our actions/practices? What can we learn from those patterns in terms of policy influence pathways? • In which political scenarios and contexts did the effective policy influence pathways identified works better and why? • What other actors and context factors have contributed to the outcomes achieved? How? • What are the consequences of these changes and those that didn't happen for the purposes we pursue and the programme strategy?
b. Learn from networking and the dynamics of articulating networks and organisations in the regional and national levels	• Which networks and organizations are participating in the CoC core group? How this composition changes along time? • What are the local network main characteristics? (e.g. who compose them, what are their main purposes, when were they created, etc.) • Which are the formal and informal operation structures of the CoC core group at regional and national level? Which work well, which not and why? What should be adapted and why? • How the networks and organizations of the CoC core group are interacting and communicating to mobilize the common agenda? What works well and what should be improved? • How are the decisions making procedures of the core groups working? How were decisions about adaptations and ideological positions made? • How the PM&E model principles and practices being implemented? Which practices and principles are being followed and which adapted? Why?; Are the responsibilities and roles assigned being fulfilled? What can be improved and why?; Is accountability among CoC core group members and toward other actors happening? How? • Are the local networks and organizations linked to the core group financial sustainable? If not, what can be done? • In general, are networking dynamics at regional and national levels being effective? Why yes or why not? What can be improved?
c. Learn about the ways in which the local networks and organisations linked to the CoC core group contribute to the common agenda, and vice versa how their articulation to the core group actually influences them and their work	• How are the core group networks and organizations contributing to the CoC common agenda? What can be improved? • What motivate and demotivate the local networks to actively participate in the CoC core group? Is there anything that can be done to improve ownership and involvement? • What are the perceived benefits of the local networks of being part of the CoC core group?
d. Learn about how the Communities of Change model is an effective mechanism that strengthens the political actions of the women's social movement	• How congruent is the National Advocacy Plan with interests of the local networks and organizations involved? Are the regional actions plans aligned with the National Advocacy plan? Why yes or why not? What can be improved? • Are the networks and organizations linked to the programme perceived as legitimate actors by the actors they are trying to influence and potential partners? • What's the perspective of the actors influenced by the CoC core group about their own process of change and about how the core group influenced them? • Is credibility and trust being built among networks and organizations participating in the CoC core group? If yes, how is this happening? • What is the value added, if any, of networking at regional and national levels to achieve the expected and unexpected outcomes? Is it possible to increase this value added? How?

	• Are further collaborative actions (apart from themes linked to the common agenda), emerging? What's their nature and purpose?
	• What contribution, if any, does the CoC model provide to the women social movement in Colombia, the democratic culture, and the citizens political exercise?

Scope of the M&E system

The **scope of the M&E system** for answering the M&E questions and capturing the perspectives and views of the different stakeholders involved were agreed. The initial scope proved to be quite ambitious. After the design and pilot phase experience, it was clear that answering the M&E questions requires not only technical capacities on data collection and analysis, but also a considerable time investment by the women involved. It was agreed to focus the self-M&E efforts on the M&E purposes "a" and "b" in the table above. While the other M&E purposes are expected to be addressed by an external evaluation, as well as collecting the perspectives of key actors influenced by the CoC core group as a means to understand the processes of change.

Design and validation of data collection and data analysis tools

Design and validation of user-friendly data collection and data analysis tools, that consider the different education levels and diversity of women involved in the Community of Change, was addressed. After testing different tools and some trial and error two main tools were adopted for data collection, sense making and decision making part of the self-M&E component, that combine elements adapted from **Outcome Mapping**[5] and the **Most Significant Change Technique**[6]**:** i. a Log Book to assess changes in key actors, to be used and updated each six months at the local, regional and national levels; and, ii. a Log Book to assess networking processes, to be used and updated twice a year at the regional level and once a year at the national level. These tools are intended to be applied in participatory spaces (for details on how these "spaces" work see section "Spaces for data collection, sense making and decision making"). Below find a brief description of the Log Books.

i.   Log Book to assess changes in Key actors:

The Log Book to assess changes in key actors is composed of three parts that are adjusted to the different geographical levels, but essentially ask for similar information.

The first part is a form to value changes in key actors. The women identified 5 actors in which they have invested most efforts, and asses their changes in a participatory way by using the following form.

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[5] Earl, Sarah, Carden, Fred & Smutylo, Terry (2001). OUTCOME MAPPING Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs. IDRC. ISBN 0-88936-959-3. e-ISBN 1-55250-021-7. 120 pages.

[6] Dart, J. J. & Davies R.J. (2005) The Most Significant Change Technique.

Table 2. Form to value changes in key actors

Key actors we tried to influence during this period	¿What behavioral changes we were expecting to influence or support in these actors? (Ideal behavior)	¿Which was the behavior of these actors, at the moment we began to influence or support them? (Initial behavior)	¿Have we observe changes? (mark with an "X" one of the following options			
			No change	Negative change	Some positive change	Significant positive change
1. Actor 1 ….	Outcome challenges copied from the annual plan, or emergent outcomes	Base line behavior copied from the annual plan, or retrospectively defined for emergent outcomes			X	
2. Actor 2 ….						X
3. …..				X		

From the actors identified, the women prioritized three to share their story of change. **The second part of the Log book** guides the women to build the story of change for each of these actors and to deepen the understanding of what happens and the implications for the programme. Two sets of questions are being asked:

a. The first set is aimed at generating dialogue and obtain elements to identify the key aspects of the story of change: who changed?; Where?; What kind of change?; How these changes contribute to the National Advocacy Plan themes and purposes?;   What has been done to contribute to the described changes? Where? With whom?; What other actors and factors contributed to the described change? How?. The answers to these questions are later used as elements to build a story of change in a creative way and a title is assigned to each story.

b. The second set aimed at deepening the reflection on the story of change, to promote sense making, learning and decision making among the women involved in each space: Why this change is important for us and for our realities/contexts?; What changes, if any, we still want to pursue in this actor?; What actions we should implement to keep influencing or supporting this actor? What have we learned from this experience, that may be useful for the policy influence work for us and for others?.

The first set of questions, are an adaptation of Outcome Journals[7]. They prove to be useful to promote reflection and dialogue among the women involved and to systematically report behavioural changes. This set of questions works good to have a preliminary dialogue to build the stories of change. Storytelling in creative ways, using cultural expressions (singing, poetry, rhymes) proves to be a good tool to provide a shared view of the behavioural changes the women contribute to, mostly when the writing skills are weak. In these cases the stories can be recorded.

The third part of the log book is focused on identifying the *stories to be told.* One or two actors with negative change or no change, are selected to answer the following set of questions: Who didn't change or change negatively? ; Where?; Why the changes did not occur as expected?; Should we continue influencing this actor? Why?; In case yes, what actions are needed to continue influencing or supporting this actor?.

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[7] Outcome Journals, is a tool proposed in Outcome Mapping to monitor outcome challenges.

The conclusions of the group for each question are registered in the log book. This is generally done on paper and introduced on the web based information system by the M&E regional coordinators (further information on the information system is provided in section II.B. Web based information system.

ii.   Log Book to assess networking processes

This tool is used to assess the articulation and networking processes at the regional and national levels. The Log Book is composed of two parts:

The first part focuses on agreeing on an "ideal" situation for the articulation and networking processes based on previously agreed networking categories, and assesses the progress towards it. Similar categories were agreed on for the regional and national levels. Examples of these categories are: Strategic vision and common agenda; planning; M&E system; National core group composition; Financial sustainability of the national core group; Communication; Interaction and collaboration among regions; Minimum capacities required within the core group; Governance structures; Decision making procedures and representativeness; and Accountability. The "ideal" situation for each category is defined once and adjusted as needed as the articulation and networking processes mature. Categories can also be adjusted or change. Once the "ideal" situation is defined or reviewed, a progress assessment towards it is done both in a numerical and descriptive way (see columns four and five in table 3).

Table 3. Form to identify progress toward ideal functioning of articulation and networking categories

Articulation and networking categories	Ideal functioning of the articulation and networking categories	Progress assessment towards the ideal *(on a Scale from 1 to 5, in which 1 = Little progress, and 5 = significant progress)*	Description of the progress towards the ideal functioning
Strategic vision and common agenda			
Planning			
M&E system			
National core group composition			
……			
……			

The second part of the log book includes a set of questions, to promote reflection, sense-making and decision making, based on the previous analysis. These questions are: What worked well in the articulation and networking processes? What was the added value, if any, of being articulated in achieving our objectives? What should be improve in the articulation and networking processes?; and, What actions are needed?

Spaces for data collection, sense making, learning and decision making

Identification and validation of the spaces needed for data collection, sense making, learning and decision making at the local, regional and national levels was done. Biannual spaces were defined for each geographical level, based on planning periods of one year. Therefore, the first round of meetings happens at the end of the first semester of the planning period, and the second round at the end of the second semester.

The graphic below shows the different sharing and reflection spaces: The *Tool for Networks' Identification,* for the local spaces is basically the presentation card of the local networks. It shows their main characteristics (e.g. creation date, who are the network members, objectives, main actions, etc.). In addition, every six months, in a two days meeting, local networks complete or update the *Log Book to Asses Changes in Key Local Actors* and share this with the other local networks at the regional spaces at the end of the year.

In the regional spaces representatives of the local networks in the region, come together each six months for 3 days, after the meetings of the local spaces. Three issues are addressed in these meetings:

a. filling in and updating the *Log Book to Asses Changes in Key Regional Actors,* the results of which are then shared by the M&E regional coordinators at the national level in the Results Panel at the end of year;
b. Filling in and updating the *Log Book to Assess Networking Processes at Regional Level*;
c. Once a year at the end of the second semester, each local network representative shares the most significant stories of change and the *Tool for identifying effective pathways for policy influence* is used as a means to build knowledge from the local level experiences (This tool is further explained in Section II.B. Tool for identifying effective pathways for policy influence)*.*

The national spaces take place in two separate types of meetings. One 1,5 day meeting every six months in which the programme coordinator and women participating in the national advocacy processes come together to fill in and update the *Log Book to Assess Changes in Key National Actors;* and another four days meeting at the end of the year, before the National Meeting called the *Results Panel.* For this meeting M&E regional coordinators and the programme coordinator bring the main M&E findings of the year, to address four main issues:

a. Effective pathways of change identified for the local level are shared to identify commonalities, divergence and lessons learnt;
b. Most significant stories of change of the regional level are shared and effective pathways of change are identified for common actors among regions;
c. Most significant stories of change of the national level are shared and its contributions to the regional and local policy processes are identified, and vice versa;
d. The *Log Book to Assess Networking at the National Level* is filled in, or the one of the previous year reviewed and updated.

Figure2. Spaces and learning cycles
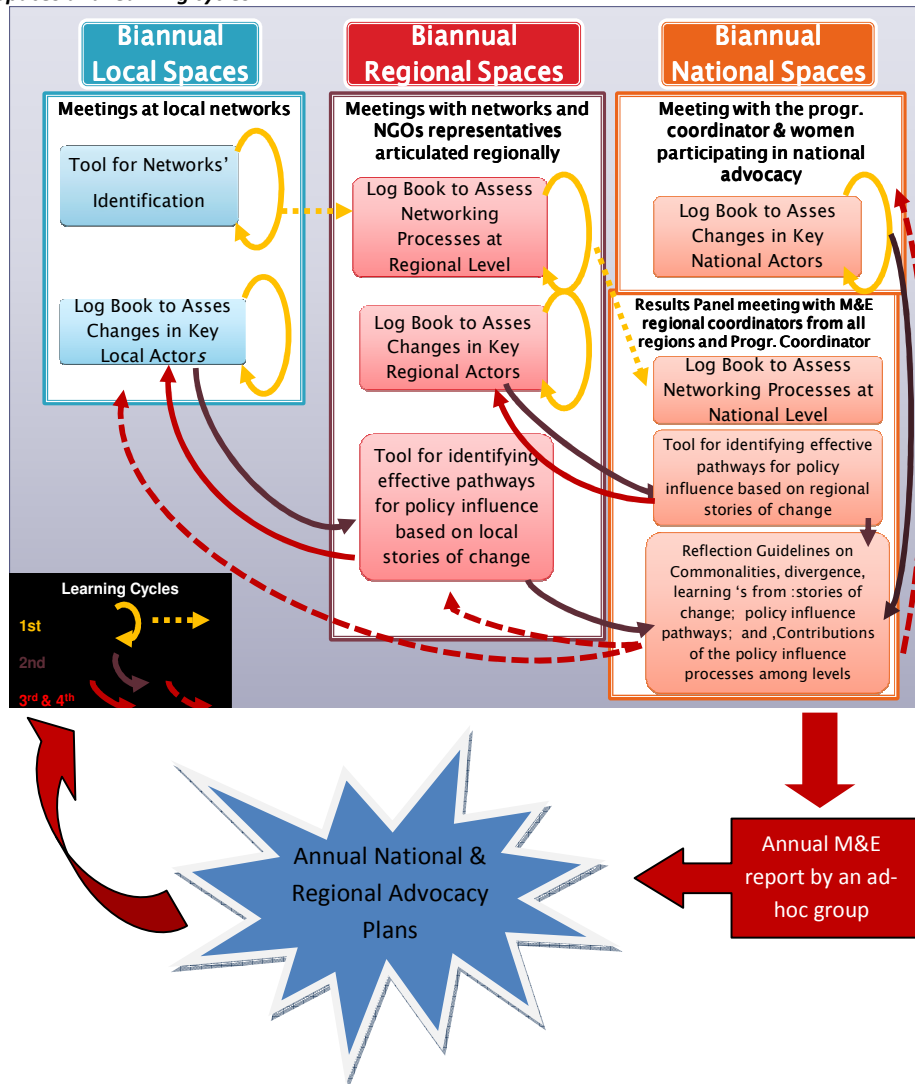
The conclusions of the Results Panel and a synthesis of M&E findings and recommendations are used by an ad-hoc sub group to prepare an M&E report to be presented at the National Meeting and to feed the next planning cycle.

The spaces proved to be an effective mean to engage women in sharing and reflecting on their networking and policy influence experiences . The experience showed that for these spaces to happen, resources are needed to support women's participation, sometimes coming from far away. Additionally, for these spaces to be productive in generating quality information, experienced facilitation is a requirement. The facilitation role was fully assumed by the external consultants during the first phase, and was shared with the M&E regional coordinators during the second phase. Guaranteeing experienced facilitation for these spaces in the long term, will be crucial for the sustainability of the PM&E system.

Information flows and learning cycles

Generating timely and quality information is still a challenge for some local networks and regions, mainly due to lack of time, little writing skills and, little information and communication technology skills of the women involved. This fact required a more active role, than initially expected, of the regional M&E regional coordinators expressed in the following quote: *"The quality of the information lies not only in the maturity of the women political processes, but on the capacity of the M&E coordinators to facilitate the data collection exercises"[8]*

Each space in itself represents a first learning cycle. The mere fact of actually making it possible for women to meet at least twice a year at each geographical level, and using the proposed M&E tools to guide and structure discussions, enables them to learn from their different views and perspectives, and provide them with real time information to improve their daily work. The second and third learning cycles depend on whether the women manage to keep written records of the Log Books of acceptable quality, to make possible cross local and cross regional learning, and the identification of patterns of success for structuring bottom up knowledge through the use of the *tool for identifying effective pathways of change*. This tool was designed and tested during the institutionalization phase, therefore further details are provided in that section. The fourth learning cycle depends on whether the M&E regional coordinators and the programme coordinator effectively communicate the lessons learnt (e.g. effective policy influence pathways), to the women involved in the local networks.

Figure 3. Information flows
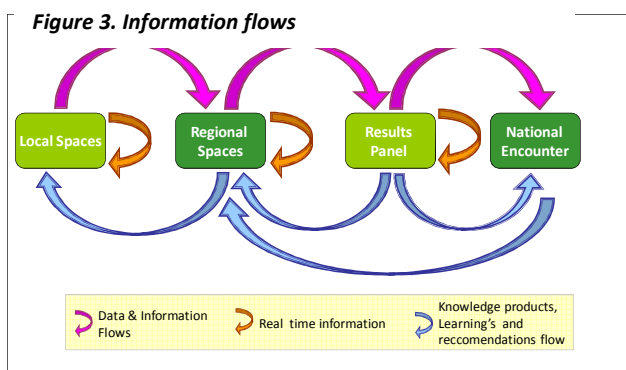
Getting right these learning cycles highly depend on the political will, synthesis and conceptualization capacities of the Programme Coordinator and M&E regional coordinators. Additionally, resources and clear agreements among the CoC core group and donor organizations, to translate the M&E findings and knowledge outputs into communication pieces, understandable for the women involved at the different geographical levels are necessary. Otherwise, their diffusion will be subject to verbal communication, or to the women capacity to navigate the online information system, which is still limited.

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[8] Quote from Santander region participant, during an exercise to assess the regions' experience in testing Log Book to assess changes in regional key actors, at the M&E national workshop held on November 28-30, 2011.

II.B. The institutionalization Phase

*"Replicating what we have learned
in other regions will definitely happen;
all we have to do is bring in
commitment and a good environment
and, that, we already have".[9]*

The institutionalization phase provides an opportunity to: run a full PM&E cycle with the regions involved; further develop the capacities of the M&E network facilitators, and M&E regional coordinators; and integrate three new regions to the PM&E system (Valle, Antioquia and Chocó).

During this phase some key issues were addressed: a. the data collection and analysis tools were refined as presented in the previous section, according to the validation experience during the Design and Pilot Phase; b. Guidelines for an actor-oriented planning were developed and tested; c. Facilitation guidelines for the local, regional and national spaces were developed and tested; d. the *Tool for identifying effective pathways for policy influence based on local/regional stories of change,* was designed and tested; e. a web base information system was designed and tested. This section provides a brief description of the last four issues.

Guidelines for an actor-oriented planning

As mentioned before, the original planning model and procedures were adapted to help make explicit an actor oriented theory of change. The new planning model was tested in four of the five regions involved, and at the National Meeting (May 21 -23, 2012). Based on these experiences, guidelines for an actor-oriented Regional Action Plans will be adjusted. The logic underlying the current proposed planning model, inspired by the Intentional Design model proposed in Outcome Mapping (OM), is shown in the following figure. It is important to mention that the OM terminology is not really used in the planning guidelines to avoid confusing the women involved, but some of the concepts are used through guiding questions.

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[9] Written by the women of the Caribe region, referring to their experiences with M&E.

Figure 4. Planning model
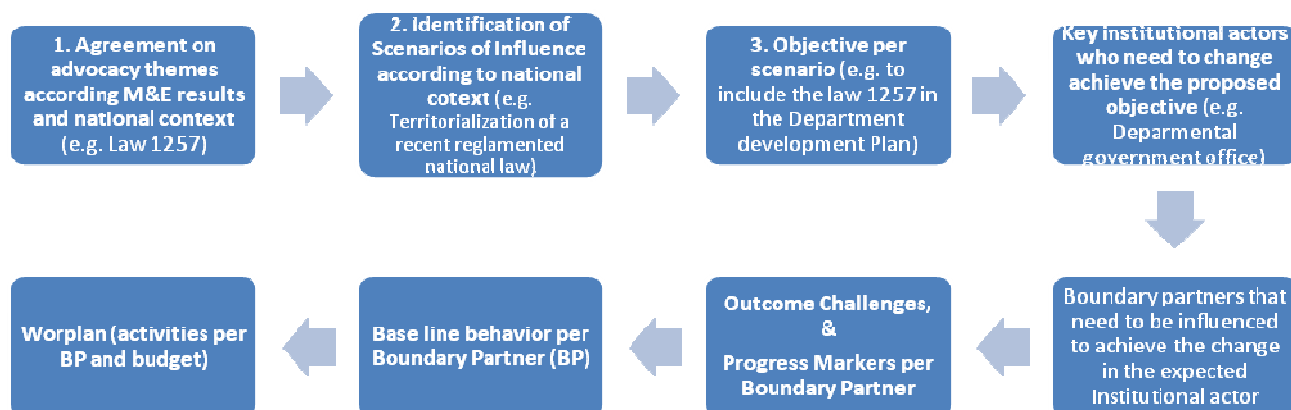
Despite the fact that in theory, the National Advocacy Plan is based on scenarios of opportunity and aimed to achieve sustainable "institutional changes", it was difficult for most women to conceptualize their policy influence strategies at this level, mainly because they are highly influenced by political activism and their strategies are still weak as expressed in the following quote: *"We lack conceptual and political insights to identify scenarios and institutional actors linked to the advocacy themes. The political exercise, helps enhancing our understanding of these elements, and makes visible the level of political maturity of each network"*[10].

Focusing on Boundary Partners and behavioural changes (Outcome Challenges & Progress Markers), has been a challenge, but there has been an enormous progress in using these concepts and the women appreciate the benefits of this approach for their work as shown in the following quotes: *"Before we use to plan without much clarity about the actors we were trying to influence… the exercise enables us to clarify doubts about the actors' identification, prioritize and define actions. Furthermore, it helped us to clarify the intention of our influence"*[11]; *A great contribution of this tool was thinking policy influence as a process, and understanding better our political proposal and actions"*[12].

The main difficulty linked to the latter is expressed in the following quote: *"we need to gain clarity on which are the institutional actors at the three geographical levels and their obligations linked to our advocacy themes"*[13]

Facilitation guidelines for the local, regional and national spaces

It was not enough, providing mere tools for data collection and analysis, for the women to be able to use them. Capacity development was a prerequisite. However, experienced facilitation became the greatest challenge for the meeting spaces. As external expert facilitation is costly, it was decided to develop facilitation guidelines for the M&E regional coordinators at these spaces. The guidelines incorporate a full agenda for the space including

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[10] Quote from a Caribbean region participant, during an exercise to assess the regions' experience in testing planning model, at the M&E national workshop held on November 28-30, 2011.

[11] Quote from a Santander region participant, during an exercise to assess the regions' experience in testing planning model, at the M&E national workshop held on November 28-30, 2011.

[12] Quote from a Valle region participant, during an exercise to assess the regions' experience in testing planning model, at the M&E national workshop held on November 28-30, 2011.

[13] Quote from a Caribbean region participant, during an exercise to assess the regions' experience in testing planning model, at the M&E national workshop held on November 28-30, 2011.

steps, timing, and facilitation dynamics to answer each of the Log Book questions pertinent for the space in question. After this PM&E cycle, examples to illustrate how to fill in the Log Books will also be incorporated.

The lack of experience in having organized and structured meetings by the women, starting by the programme coordinator, have made it difficult for the M&E regional coordinators to take full advantage of the guidelines. Also balancing between being a facilitator and being an actor in the group is a challenge.

Web based information system

Crucial for the successful implementation of the self-monitoring system was a web based information system to help storing and managing the information emerging from the local, regional and national spaces. During this phase the information system was designed and some of its components tested by the women, while few components are currently under development (see, http://mujeresyviolencias.net). The information system made possible the storage of data from the Log Books, the generation of reports based on different categories predefined by the women (see an example in the section below), facilitates searching specific information of interest, and speed up the information flows amongst the geographical levels.

Currently some interactive sections to enhance communication and interaction amongst the women from different networks and regions are under construction. These sections comprises: chat; wall for news and advertise/demand services; a drop box to share documents, communication materials (pictures, videos, brochures), or other knowledge products of interest; a data base on "feminicidios[14]"; and, a data base of women from the CoC involved in election campaigns.

Improve internet access of the local networks and the capacities of its members to manage the system is fundamental to take advantage of the potential of the information system.

Tool for identifying effective pathways for policy influence

Based on the M&E findings of the last two years and on discussions held at national workshops, classification categories for the stories of change were identified to facilitate data analysis, per: Type of actor that changed; type of changes identified; type of actions done to influence or support the change in the actor; and, type of 'other actors' that contributed to influence or support the achieved behavioural changes. The web based information system enables to make cross-regional and cross network reports linked to these categories. These reports are taken to the regional spaces at the end of the year and to the Results Panel, facilitating the identification of patterns and divergence of the local and regional stories of change, encouraging sense-making and learning. These reports are used as a base for discussion to fill in the *Tool for identifying effective pathways for policy influence,* which is a way to synthesize bottom up knowledge from field experiences.

Table 4. Tool for identifying effective pathways for policy influence

Type of institutional actor:
Based on the learning's' from the local network experiences, If you were extremely successful in influencing this type of actor, what do you expect the actor be doing differently or better? Which would be the actors ideal behavior?
How would you know that this actor is progressing towards the ideal behavior?

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[14] Woman assassination, because of being a woman.

Based on the knowledge gained by the local networks, which influencing pathways were the most effective, under which circumstances?	Based on the learning's' from the local network experiences, which were the most effective actions?
Influence Pathway 1. (e.g. Indirect Influence through citizens control (Veeduria ciudadana), to assess the performance of x actor in compliance with current legislation. This approach works well when there's no political will.	**Action 1.** Conform a citizens committee Action 2. Request a report from the x actor on their performance, through legal means (derecho de peticion) Action 3. .....
Influence pathway 2. (e.g. direct influence through lobbing the government officials with in charge)	**Action 1......** **Action 2 .....**
Based on the local networks experience, which influencing pathways you DON'T recommend and why?	
What can be done at the other geographical levels to improve the influence in this type of actor?	

Currently the tool is applied to identify effective influence pathways for both the local and the regional levels. This information is registered in meeting minutes and should be uploaded to the information system for a broader distribution. The knowledge outcomes of the exercise are expected to become a key input for the political capacity development of the women involved in the CoC.

Lessons learnt in the development phase

Some aspects that helped the process of participatory design and validation of the system include:

- The participatory approach made it possible for the M&E system to give priority to the learning needs and information demands of the women involved in the programme, which enhanced the feeling of ownership in the two pilot regions.
- The need of the women involved to establish working methods that are better structured created a positive environment that made it easier for them to actively participate in the M&E experience, as this was perceived as a way to strengthen the programme's strategy, learning, communication and interaction between regions.

Some important aspects that hampered the process of participatory design and validation of the system include:

- Especially NGO's, the programme coordinator and the steering group had limited time available to participate in the process, due to their heavy workloads and the fact that some of the activities during the design and pilot phase of the M&E system were superimposed to the work agendas of the programme and local networks.
- A common language and understanding of the programme and its scope was lacking, which meant that it had to be generated first before moving on to define the scope and contents of the M&E system.
- A deliberate culture where decisions are taken based on facts and information is fairly new.
- The women who participated had little knowledge of M&E and the use of information gathering and analysis tools. It was therefore necessary to build their capacities while the design and validation of the system was taking place, in order to enhance their participation in the process.
- The different degrees to which networking is coordinated in each region and linked to the National Advocacy Plan, brought up the challenge of developing uniform information gathering and analysis tools.

Reflections by Cordaid

- *I always had difficulty in explaining the process towards influencing power relations from the local to the national level in Colombia. The conventional Cordaid methods for evaluating effectiveness and progress towards goals are difficult and often useless in networks. With the start of this M&E trajectory I was finally able to show the importance of investing in relation building and networking processes in a complex context like Colombia (Colombia desk officer).*
- *Women's rights organizations are often movement based and designed to deal with the structural roots of gender inequality, for which the current range of monitoring tools are often inappropriate. That is why we needed to look for other methods (Colombia desk officer).*

Feedback from the participants
- *The planning phase was not part of the M&E project, since the planning of the program happened at the beginning of the year, well before the M&E pilot started. The planning instruments therefore are still rather weak, based on activities. A lot of organizations plan their activities based on what they usually do and know, for instance, organizing marches, without thinking with what objective. (Consultant M&E)*

- *" In the beginning we didn't understand what to do with the forms. After making adjustments to the forms we understood them better and this facilitated the use." " We thought it would be something super complicated. The first forms gave us grey hair, but it became better. We made some adjustments to improve the tools. The forms help us, it is not something horrible". " The tools seem technical, but they are political". "We thought they would bring us a system already fixed, but we needed to adapt it to our needs. Now we need less time to fill in the forms, but it still takes time". (Women at national meeting)*
- *The more we learn now how to use the online database, the more we want to give feedback to adjust the forms and make it our own (woman from Santander).*

Conclusions
- Facilitating the CoC core group engagement by ensuring resources for them to attend the PM&E meetings, and further develop their evaluative thinking capacities is fundamental for the long term sustainability of the system.
- Getting the right balance between the time the M&E regional coordinators invest on their M&E role and in leading political actions, is crucial to avoid weakening the policy influence processes. M&E still represents an additional work load for them, and implies also taking away time from activities to ensure their economic stability. If PM&E is understood as a management and programme development tool, as well as a mean to improve the women's political action capacities, paying the M&E coordination role should be considered both by the CoC core group and funders.
- Institutionalizing self-M&E for programme management and development, require political will from those involved to actively participate, great attention on developing PM&E and evaluative thinking capacities in those involved in the CoC core group, as well as the openness and flexibility of the programme coordinator and funders to adapt planning models, reporting requirements, decision making procedures, roles and responsibilities.
- Commitment from the funders, programme coordinator and women, to use data and rapid feedback to make sense of what emerges along the process, and use this understanding to take next steps, is key to benefit from the time and resources invested.

- Funders and programme coordination willing to try out and trust the women being accountable more for their learning and the way they make use of what they learn in their political actions, instead of focusing on being accountable to predefined outcomes, is a condition for self-M&E of complex situations to succeed.
- External 'flexible' experts might be required to support the needed adaptations of the PM&E system in complex, uncertain and dynamic conditions.
- The overall PM&E process implies a reconfiguration of the relationships between the women that take up PM&E responsibilities (i.e. M&E regional coordinators and M&E network facilitators), other network participants (NGOs and feminists experts), and the programme coordinator. They felt empowered not just to be sitting at the table, but on having a voice in the meetings to discuss strategies and future direction. Evidence of this power reconfiguration has been registered in the networking ideal characteristics, defined in the "Log Book to assess networking processes", and was also evident in the last National Meeting, in which a committee was created to negotiate the future direction of the programme with Cordaid, differently from the previous year's centralized negotiations with the programme coordinator.
- Some people do not feel comfortable with asking difficult questions, and identifying the shortcomings. Therefore, building trust among participants and confidence on having an open dialogue is crucial for self-M&E approaches to work properly.
- Asking the right questions at the right time, developing practical data collection and analysis tools that take into account who needs what information, when and for what purpose, is key to capture the attention and guarantee the CoC core group engagement. Further simplification of the Loog Books is required, mostly now that external facilitation won't be available anymore.

Lessons learnt on M&E in action

The approach taken to deal with M&E on the basis of questions rather than indicators, means that the structure and content of the M&E system can be kept up to date, regardless of the possible annual modifications of the National Advocacy Plan and the Regional Action Plans. If there is a common information pool available that stems from learning questions and builds upon the views of the women involved, the exchange of experiences and the collective construction of knowledge amongst local, regional and national levels become easier, without losing sight of the specific characteristics of each region.

Reflections by Cordaid

- *A shared knowledge based on what works and what does not, leads to strengthening capacities in areas that I never believed would happen: knowledge, ownership, visibility, leadership. In general women are empowered individually and collectively (Colombia desk officer).*
- *The M&E system is still complicated to explain. The complex context of more than 50 years conflict; the politically polarised women's movement; the voluntary and diverse membership; and the geographical spread of the program, multiply the complexity, uncertainty and unpredictability. The management of an M&E system is complex too (Colombia desk officer).*

Feedback from participants
Advantages:

- *"The concept of Communities of Change also was very useful for the decision making process, to determine who belongs to the core group, and to conceptualize the social dynamics. This corresponds very well to Outcome Mapping (changes in boundary partners).*
- *The Colombian people have a very narrative culture. Most Significant Change is a rigorous technique to describe the histories." (Consultant M&E)*
- *"We have learned that monitoring is not something technical. The monitoring gives elements for decision making. We are much more process facilitators than technical advisors." (Consultants M&E)*
- *The monitoring system responds to local needs. The system has not been constructed from above, it has been very much build the way the program has been built, in a participatory way. (Women Santander)*
- *" The monitoring is transformed into a management tool. This means that the monitoring processes should include the representatives with decision making functions." (Consultant M&E)*
- *"The monitoring system has brought a lot of positive things, but there are challenges. The monitoring gives data, but we have to give these data a voice. We have to learn to analyse the data.   To use the forms in a dynamic way requires capacity building. Also to enter the information in the system we need administrative and technical capacities." (Woman Santander)*
- *Now the networks use the M&E system not only for the Women and Violence program, but also for their other work. They are thinking about creating a 'room' on the net for reflection and exchanging experiences for example. (Consultant M&E)*
- *Telling the stories gave a space for women to develop their artistic capacities to tell stories. New talents emerged (Reflection paper)*
- *"Some change histories are good, others not. For instance, what is a change in discourse? The discourse may be just for the form, they say one thing and do another thing. The change should also be visible in behaviour." " A baseline is difficult, but the tendencies in the change stories are useful to analyse. You can look if there is a logic sequence in the changes reported each year." (Consultant M&E)*

Concerns:
- *At the national level the M&E system has not been sufficiently used as a tool for management. The facilitator hasn't put enough effort in the M&E. Therefore there are plans to change the system for the M&E, to assign three women as regional coordinators. They will have the task to implement the system, to build capacities and to make people conscious of how to use the information. The women need to see the value of the information, if they don't see it, they won't use it anymore. (Consultant M&E)*
- *The data base becomes very heavy. At the local level two different forms are being used: a form to describe the changes in actors, each 6 months they collect 3 significant changes in 3 actors; and a form to update the changes in the local networks. This way the database includes 60 forms with histories in 20 regions. This is now included in a web based information system, organized in a way that makes searching per type of change, type of actors, etc. possible. It was a lot of work to integrate the information in the system. The women presented their forms, the M&E coordinators commented on the forms, the women adjusted the forms based on these comments, before they were published on the web. (Consultant M&E)*
- *It is a very intensive system. The information processes take a lot of time, the information has to be of good quality. The information has to be analysed. Who is going to revise the forms? There is a lot of*

information coming from the regions. The spaces to collect the histories have to be facilitated. These are 50 meetings per year...(Consultant M&E)

- *"The networks are very wide, the women have to travel a lot. Some regional networks consist of 14 local networks or organizations. This is a lot of work for the M&E coordinators" " It is a marathon. We want to amplify the system, but this requires more resources. Instead of one woman per network it would be better to work with three or four women. We want to have the meetings in different locations, but that costs more" (Women Santander)*

- *"In the categories of the change in actors the issue of the armed conflict isn't reflected. The monitoring doesn't cover the conflict sufficiently." (Woman from Meta) " The pilot regions are not the regions that suffer the most from the armed conflict. The conflict comes up as elements in the context analysis. But the monitoring doesn't give specific information on how the conflict affects the work. The women also don't want to document it because they are afraid" (Consultant M&E)*

- *"Historically women have been assigned a lot of roles. The monitoring has put another strain on the women. The women continue with more work without payment. We are three days in a meeting for the monitoring. That is not a positive element, the burden of the monitoring." (Women Santander)*

Challenges for implementing the M&E system in the other regions

*"The sustainability of the system
is fundamental,
only by managing and acquiring resources
will we be able to keep it going."*[15]

Some of the challenges inherent to setting up the M&E system that were brought forward through personal interviews and by the women who participated in the lessons learned workshop were:

- Awaken the interest, commitment and willingness of the other regions to become involved in the M&E system. It's been difficult to convince them that even though setting up the system is time consuming, as skills are learned, processes become more efficient and the time required is reduced.

- The wide diversity and heterogeneity of the formal educational levels of the women who participate (some have no professional or technical training, while others can't read or write) mean that some regions can become involved with the M&E system only to a limited degree. During the set-up phase, an assessment shall be made of how audiovisual means might be used to partially overcome this limitation.

- The quality of the information generated through the M&E system is directly related to the level of maturity of the network, the political strength and the economic sustainability to be able to develop more continuous processes of lobby and advocacy.

- Internet access and the interconnectivity of the women who participate in the programme, needs to be improved to prevent the lack of technology from becoming a barrier to their involvement in the M&E system.

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[15] Written by the women of the Caribe region, referring to their experiences with M&E.

- Analyse what kind of information shall be included in the information system, as well as the security and access protocols that are needed to avoid exposing the political activists and leaders who participate in the programme to face personal security risks.
- Have the necessary financial resources available to keep the M&E system running in the relevant local, regional and national spaces, which implies long trips and transportation costs.

III. Outcomes of the M&E process: Results achieved to date through the experience with M&E

"Monitoring and evaluation
led to our inclusion, motivation and appreciation,
and now we're pioneers
of advocacy that leads to transformation".

a) Strengthening and clarifying relationships, roles and expectations

#### a.1 Identify internal and external actors and the roles the play within the CoC.

Women who participate directly in the PM & E have gained clarity about the actors involved in the CoC and the nature of the relationships and interactions they establish with each one of them:

- Actors within the core group: these actors are directly involved in the definition of the common agenda (women's networks, organizations and individuals that make up local networks, CORDAID, Synergia and support NGOs).

- Strategic partners: these are actors with which the common agenda is partially or totally shared (although they do not participate in its formulation) and with whom cooperation links are established to implement policy influence strategies. Some may just be ad hoc allies with whom they collaborate for social mobilizations on commemorative dates.

- Legal and political actors: the main target of the policy influence strategies, these are the actors where they are trying to achieve behavioral change in order to promote changes in policy, resource allocation, enforcement, etc.

Gained clarity on this issue was reflected in a greater capacity to make explicit the "actor oriented theory of change" in their planning exercises and also on their ability to differentiate these different types of actors when applying specific monitoring tools developed for each type. That is, report behavioral changes of the social actors they are trying to influence, determine the contribution made by each network (as members of the core group) to the proposed changes, and identify direct and indirect influence pathways while improving the identification of collaborators (strategic partners) and allies contributing to the observed changes.

In 2011, 20 local networks from 4 regions participated in the M&E process at the local, regional and national level. Overall, 49 stories of change in local actors and 19 stories to tell (desired changes not yet achieved) from the local level were collected, plus 7 stories of change in regional actors and 2 stories to tell from the regional

level. All these 77 log books to assess changes in key regional and local actors were organized and classified as an important input for the annual results panel meeting. Common actors were grouped in order to map them using the CoC terminology and concepts. This exercise proved to be very useful to get a clear picture of the advocacy work that the women collectively performed during 2011. The following picture shows a graphic representation of how this CoC looked like during that year. Repeating this exercise on an annual basis could also provide an interesting overview of the program's evolution through time.
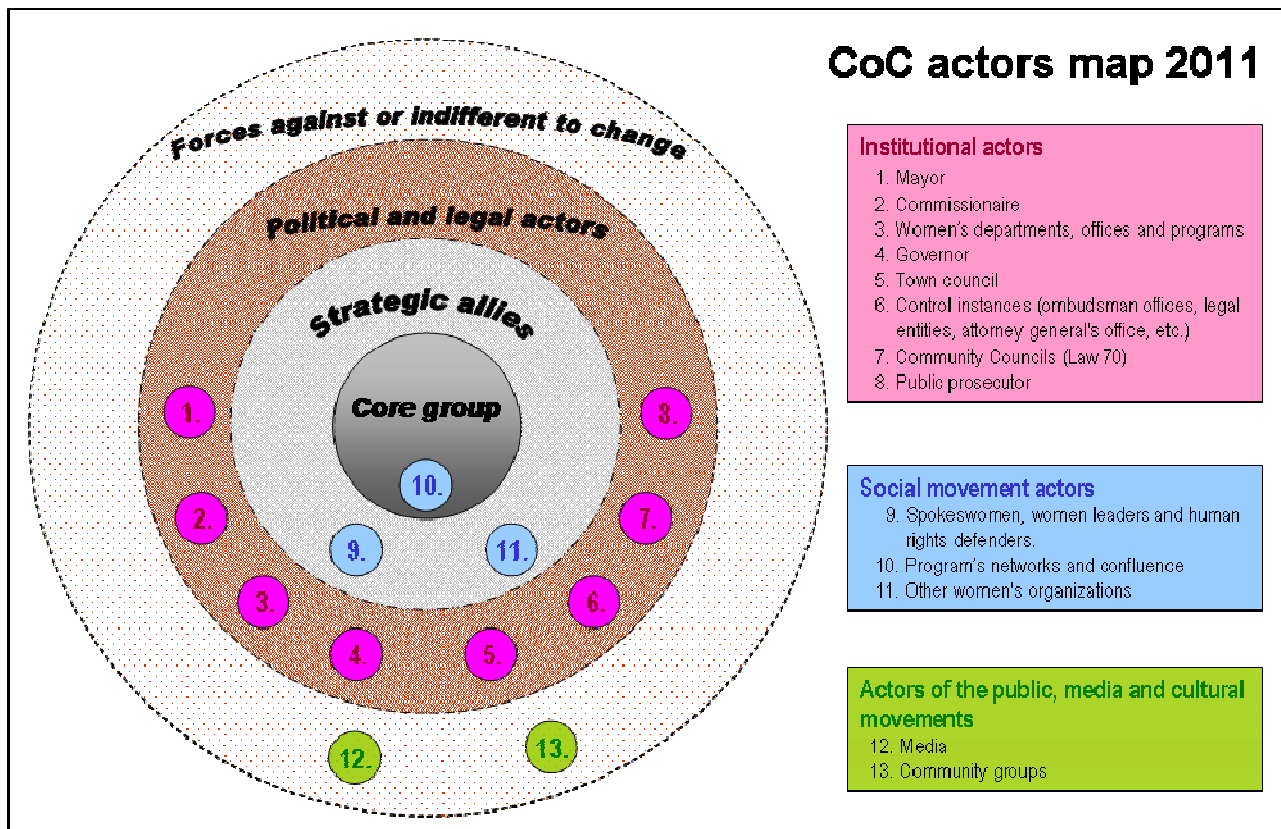
a.2 Assess the contributions and participation of the different core group actors to the CoC

The monitoring work has served to show the contributions that the various actors provide to the CoC. Initially, the donor's economic contributions tended to overrate the in-kind contributions, knowledge and working time provided by the program networks. The exercise of identifying which actors make up the core group and how they participate, allowed the participants to reconsider their own contributions to the process and recognize that while the Cortaid's contribution is strategic (funding meetings that otherwise could not take place) it only represents about 10 % of the total program budget. Also, this review led some regions to the decision to change the rules of participation of regional areas. For example, in a region (Santander) restricted the participation of NGOs, now only have a voice but not vote on group decisions, in another region (Valle) was decided that the regional space is an exclusive network of organizations not agree that any NGO involved individually.

The following table shows an example coming from a local network from Santander region. It is an extract of a local network diagnosis tool where participants are asked to report the most significant contributions they have received as a network from strategic allies:

Main organizations or institutions that have given some support to your network		
Organization or institution name	**What kind of support?**	**When and how long?**
Association of Women Farmers and Artisans of Concepción "ASMUARCON"	Human capital: - participation of women in convening and preparation of events. - embodiment of demonstrations. - events logistics	Ever since our network started in 2007.
ASODECER, AHIACON, ASOMUCAFA-CON, ASODEMA, ASOMAGAR, ASOMACAPI, Rural Women, Community Shops	We have received logistic support for the realization of several social mobilizations and events.	Most of them have been supporting us since we started in 2007.
CORPODIGNA	We have received financial support for the network, through the 2010 Action Plan supported by Synergy-Cordaid that was executed by this corporation.	2010 (financial support) 2011 (human resources)
Synergia through Inter redes (Santander's regional network)	Through the small projects fund and the Inter redes action plan. ´The regional network has also been able to consolidate and do some training, commemorative events and meetings for the regional network nodes.	Last 3 years
Compromiso Foundation	This foundation made a political training school for women and we were invited as participants. From there came the idea to form a regional network to continue with the training and support for women as political actors.	Ever since our network started un 2007.
Mujer y Futuro Foundation	The foundation has executed several projects for strengthening the local networks; one of them was through the third Peace Laboratory. Through this project accompaniment, advice and assessment were provided to local organizations in order to improve women's skills for advocacy in public policy and equity gender (March 2009-December 2010). In 2011 with the funding of government of Santander the Foundation also ran a project to strengthen local networks and funded the Inter redes' action plan.	Last 3 years
Fundevidadigna	Exercises and spaces to think and reflect about issue of women political participation and advice	Last 2 years
Corpomusas	Workshops on Law 1257 and Auto 092	Last 3 years
UNDP	Funding for the publication of the Santander agenda with respect for women. Implementation of the regional forum for women representation and citizenship participation (women candidates)	Last 6 months
Chamber of commerce	Fundings for different network events	Last 4 years
UNAD	Auditorium loan for our network events	Ever since our network started in 2007.
Rovirenses Dairy	Help with refreshments for our meetings and events	Last 2 years

Regional radio and TV stations: Los Andes Stereo, Latina Stereo, Voces Rovirenses, Arcoma TV, García Rovira news, Melmo adversitising.	Continued coverage and support of our advocacy actions.	Last 2 years

"With the reflection in the monitoring process there is more definition about who is taking part in the core group. This led to a difference in opinion about the participation of the Ruta Pacifica (a national network in the department of Santander) and Compromiso (an NGO). Now there is more thinking about the structures: what are the participants' roles in this process" The Ruta has a national agenda and Compromiso sees herself as accompanier of women's groups more than actor in its own right. It was not easy to take this decision, but we decided that they should not take part in our core group. Now we see them as our strategic allies in the Community of Change. The M&E system gave more clarity on the spaces and the rules of the game." (Woman Santander).

a.3 Revitalization of passive local networks and articulation between local, regional and national levels

The exchange between the different networks at regional and national level has contributed to make more explicit who are the participants of the program, how they articulate in the different regions, and to have a better understanding on the articulation at national level. This clarity has helped the local networks to understand how they relate to the regional and national levels, and how their work contributes to these other levels. The M&E process (information gathering, meetings, data analysis, etc.) has helped several local networks that were weak or passive to be revitalized and to take up the advocacy work. These networks claim that visualizing how their local efforts are linked to regional and national processes empowers them giving a greater sense and transparency to what they do. Mapping all local participating networks and the information flows between local, regional and departmental levels has helped to put in evidence not only the coverage and range of action of the program but also the potential for lobbying and advocacy that comes from the articulated work these three levels of action: local perspectives and demands can be mainstreamed to regional and national level and upper level decisions can be locally grounded.

"It has been shown in various examples how the local level has been empowered by information sharing and how they have learned to claim their space and their agenda." (Cordaid desk officer).

a.4 Acknowledging the program plurality and heterogeneity as a strength

The monitoring work has allowed the participants to recognize the plurality of the program networks and organizations as strength and a comparative advantage that should be reinforced. Instead of trying to standardize the way of planning in the regions, the program has opted for an approach that respects the particularities of each locality, but still provides a framework to coordinate efforts around a common agenda.

The following table shows an example from a local network in Valle del Cauca. The women are asked to report on their local network constituency. Sharing this kind of results with all local networks (4 regions) has made visible their own heterogeneity. What they used to see as an exception, is in fact a common feature among almost all local networks and therefore a characteristic to be encouraged and preserved.

Who constitute your local network? (please specify the number and type of organizations, groups or individuals)
• Group "Forming the Future" (30 women heads of household)   • Group "Creative Hands" (30 women)   • Environmental promotion group (3 women)   • Group "Better Living" (53 elderly people)   • Group of rural elderly people   • Project for comprehensive training of children, young people with disabilities (special classroom)   • El Estadio Community Action Council   • Association of Communal Action Boards   • Association of Retired Persons (217 people)   • Youth Network (15 youth)   • Councilor

Taking into account the structure of your network, please select the appropriate categories

Quantity	Category
3	1. Community based organizations and associations
5	2. Groups and collectives
	3. Individuals
1	4. Networks
1	5. Academic institutions
	6. Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)
	7. Cooperatives
	Other, specify: Councillor

Select the women's groups that best characterize your network conformation

X	1. Craftswomen
X	2. Women-headed households
	3. Women displaced by the armed conflict
X	4. Peasant women
	5. Afro-Colombian women
	6. Indigenous women
X	7. Community-based women
X	8. Professional women
	9. Population LBTI (lesbian, bisexual, transexual, intersexual)
X	10. Feminist women
X	Other, specify: young women, older women and environmentalists women.

> *"The monitoring system helps to strengthen the articulations. It supports the transformation of the organizations at all levels. To look at the women in their diversity. All voices should be included in the Community of Change."* *(Woman in Valle del Cauca)*

a.5 Monitoring the networking in the program has led to analyze and modify its structure and function

The monitoring process allowed women to also look at the functioning of the program itself. Monitoring of the way networking takes place has raised the need to assess and discuss the regional spaces such as: structure, operation, roles of those involved, regional representatives, decision making mechanisms and scope, etc. Therefore the monitoring system includes an analysis on the current situation of the network and the ideal situation they want to achieve. Participating regions have defined their ideal way of functioning as a network, and they have begun to monitor the progress towards this ideal. Four of the five regions involved, applied the tool, and manifested it was very useful to better understand the way they relate to each other and revitalizing their networking. The tool has also been applied for the national level, showing the need for adjustments at the decision making level and program structure. For example the traditional national structure (national coordinator plus its support group) is now being questioned. Would it be better to decentralize some of the national roles and functions to the regional level. This discussion emerged at the last results panel meeting (March 2012) and was added as a topic to be discussed in the next national meeting (May 2012).

> *" We can look at ourselves as an organization; look at our weaknesses, at how we function. The relations have changed, it is clearer now who are part of the network*". *"It has made clear to us that we don't have the same level of understanding of the processes. It shows us the need to communicate more and to reflect on the different levels of progress." (Reflections paper).*

a.6 Understanding advocacy work as a long term process that requires clarity and consistency to achieve the desired outcomes

The identification of changes in key social actors and the planning exercises focused on actors have enabled the networks to look at their advocacy work not as isolated activities but as a process over time with specific intermediate results to be indentified and achieved. This shift about what advocacy work is about has been reflected in the development of 'actor focused action plans', both for the national and regional levels, and also in the way that political lobby activities are now being organized. Some local networks have also decided, by their own initiative, to adopt an actor based planning approach.

a.7 Dimensioning feasible changes by type of actor

Because the networks deal with complex interventions, the participants have different ideas and expectations on the changes to achieve, on the way these changes can be realized, and on their own responsibilities and roles. The M&E process has helped the women to describe the desired changes in a more realistic way, based on what is feasible within a certain time and taking the available resources into account. This is among others due to a better understanding of the roles of the actors they try to influence. Monitoring results clearly show that is has now become evident for most of the women that advocacy work is a process that should seek different types of changes in different categories of actors. They explicitly recognize that the program aims to influence three main actor categories: actors from political and legal institutions, actors from the women social movement and actors from the public opinion and socio-cultural movement. For each of these categories they are also able to identify specific types of actors and types of desired changes.

> *"For the monitoring of the municipal budget, the municipality installed a committee. 12 women from the local women's networks participated. They were the most active participants in the committee. The local government guaranteed a gender perspective in the plans. There is a new government now, but the gender work will continue, there is now a 2% budget for gender." (Representative of the local government in Bucaramanga).*
>
> *"The networks bring a more rural focus in the debate. That is the advantage of the networks, they have a broad perspective, while the NGOs are more local." (Representative of the local government in Bucaramanga).*
>
> *"The networks also played an important role in the support to female candidates in the local elections. They organized workshops for the female candidates. The women political candidates agreed to work on gender issues, violence against women, etc." (Representative of the local government in Bucaramanga).*
>
> *"Strength of the network is that they do research, that we used in the context analysis of the government. Santander was the first department to have a Plan de Desarrollo (annual development plan of the departmental government). There is a secretary of women who usually use their funds for courses for some women or a playground or the funds are being transferred to other departments. Now, with the influence of the network they invest in more structural programs for women. The credibility of the network has improved a lot. We now call for the network to participate in our policy discussions." (Deputy of Santander).*

b) Learning about the progress towards the development objectives

The monitoring of the changes in actors functions as a retrospective mechanism to identify the progress towards the changes envisaged, and enables the reflection on the steps to take for further action. The women are more conscious of the strategy they follow, the results obtained and have identified the lessons learned. These reflections now start to become the basis for adjustments and the elaboration of new action plans. There is more understanding and a better identification of the different actors: those that need to change their behaviour through influencing actions; and those identified as allies.

b.1 Having concrete monitoring results allows for more assertive and strategic decision making

The fact that there is 'hard' information, on the results of their work, instead of information based on opinions, helps the local networks to show the importance of their work, and based on this, to take part in the decision making processes at the national level. The decision making processes have become much more participative, and there is more follow-up on the decisions that have been taken. The continuous documentation of responses represents an important source for reflection, analysis and informed decision-taking.

Future plans are no longer simply repeating actions that turned out well or the traditional activities that the local networks are good at (for example social mobilization and public demonstrations). The M&E is starting to provide evidence for the participants to make decisions based on information that comes from the collected data, leaving less room for decisions based on prejudices, personal opinions, dominant leaderships or sectorial interests present at the local, regional and national levels.

A clear example of how the M&E results provided useful feedback for the planning process happened during the formulation process of the 2011 regional action plans. Traditionally the program work focused on two main legal instruments: the Law 1257 (legislates all forms of violence against women) and the Auto 092 (provides relief for internally displaced women); A detailed analysis of the local log books to assess changes in key actors, showed the women that there were no stories related to the Auto 092. This finding led to a heated debate about why the local networks were not addressing this issue anymore. The final conclusion was that there had been important modifications in the legal and institutional context (a new war victims law and several new state institutions are being created) at the regional and national level, and that the local networks were having a difficult time trying to interpret the old and new laws. Therefore identifying the institutional actors that they should address was almost impossible. Finally all network efforts related to the enforcement of Auto 092 came to an end during 2011 in the expectation of a clearer scenario. In terms of the planning process it meant that all available resources were to be allocated to enforcement actions of law 1257.

> *"It is crucial to define the key actors, to identify with whom to make strategic alliances. Sometimes you have to find other actors to reach the actors you want to influence, policy makers who inform the Mayor for instance."* (Woman from Valle).
>
> *"The M&E information gives us also the possibility to look at the costs of the different strategies, what is the cost and benefit of the actions?"* (Woman Santander).
>
> *"Before, we evaluated the activities, not the processes. We did a planning, but not based on what works better, or on what we learned. It became clear that we are very focused on the provincial level, and less at the local level. Now we continue our lobby at the provincial level, but we realize that we should also strengthen the local level."* (Woman Santander).

b.2 Questioning activism leads to more strategic thinking

As a result of the exercises in planning and monitoring of change in actors, women begin to question the way they organize their work and recognize the need to focus and prioritize in order to optimize available resources and improve the effectiveness of their advocacy. The women now see that they used to work in a very activist way. They were busy with a lot of different, ad-hoc, activities.

The monitoring of the changes in actors functions as a retrospective mechanism to identify the progress towards the changes envisaged, and enables the reflection on the steps to take for further action. The women are more conscious of the strategies they follow; the results obtained and have identified the lessons learnt. These reflections now start to become the basis for adjustments and the elaboration of new action plans. There is better understanding and a more precise identification of the different actors and the best strategies to engage them: some of those actors can be influenced directly by the program networks others cannot be engaged directly so allies must be identified, and in some cases there are actors with whom it is impossible (or even undesirable) to interact in any way (mainly due to personal safety issues related to armed conflict situations).

> *"We were very busy with doing, doing, doing; knocking on the mayor's door for example. The monitoring helped us to focus our actions, to make them more effective. We reflect on the processes, was it worthwhile or not, we identify the changes, and adjust the activities."* (Women Santander).
>
> *"We think in changes now. We think strategic now. It saves us time and frustration."* (Reflection paper).

"The monitoring system helps us to be more clear and more rational in what we do. We are more strategic, in the use of resources and of our time. We can consolidate the results in our reports." (Woman Santander).

"There is more discussion on what is political lobby. We now understand there are levels of lobby. For some of us it was enough to have the mayor participating in the council. But is that really the change we need? It made us reflect on the type of changes we want to achieve." (Reflection paper).

"We work with actors who are involved, but some actors who want to work with us are opportunistic. By the analysis of actors, we can identify those actors who see women only as voters." (Women in Santander).

b.3 The collective construction of knowledge increases the program's effectiveness

The dialogue and reflection that take place in local spaces constitute the first learning cycle that facilitates the adjustment of actions in real time and at each level. It is expected that the information flows along the different geographical levels and the availability of information through the information system will lead to a permanent discussion about what is being monitored. This strengthens learning by the allied actors and the women involved. This collectively constructed, experience based, knowledge (as opposed to theoretical or speculative knowledge) is being transmitted among regions so all of them are being able to benefit from each others experience. These information flows between regions and networks are examples of chained learning cycles.

The following table shows an example from a regional network in the Caribe. Participants were asked to report the exchanges and collaborations that took place between the network members or with other organizations that are part of the program CoC. This exercise raised the participants' awareness about the existing collaboration mechanisms they commonly use and possibilities for improvement. As a result the local networks felt a stronger desire to collaborate on a regional level and agreed on looking for a name and logo for this regional network (perhaps also following Santander's example where the regional network calls itself "Inter Redes"). Another interesting result was the new visibility of the various contributions from the less consolidates networks (RECAR and Montes de Maria Women's Network) to the more consolidated networks (REDMUCOV and Cartagena Empowerment Network). These four local networks used to perceive all regional exchanges going exclusively in one direction (from the older and stronger networks to the newer or weaker ones).

EXCHANGES AND COLLABORATION BETWEEN NETWORKS AND ORGANIZATIONS IN THE REGION			
Discuss and record the major exchanges or collaborations that have taken place between local networks and organizations in the region that are part of the Program (not included in the Regional Action Plan).			
From (network or organization)	To (red or organization)	Exchange description	Type of exchange or collaboration
Cartagena Empowerment Network	RECAR	Gender workshops for the City Council Women Central Committee, with CIDA's support.	Training
Cartagena Empowerment Network	Montes de Maria Women's Network	Support for the formulation of a project to submit to UN / Women	Support for project formulation
Cartagena Empowerment Network	Montes de Maria Women's Network	Guidance for completing M&E tools and reporting formats	Support for monitoring

REDMUCOV	RECAR	Guidance for completing M&E tools and reporting formats	Support for monitoring
Cartagena Empowerment Network	Montes de Maria Women's Network RECAR	Facilitation of workshops defined in 2011 action plan reagaring: Law 1257, oversight committees, advocacy, communication and legal assessment.	Training
REDMUCOV	RECAR	Facilitation of workshops defined in 2011 action plan reagaring: Law 1257, oversight committees, advocacy, communication and legal assessment.	Training
Cartagena Empowerment Network and CEMCI	Montes de Maria Women's Network	Guidance on organizational administrative issues	Training
Cartagena Empowerment Network	RECAR	Guidance documents and support materials for training. Development of local agendas, brochures and project proposals.	Documents and supporting materials
Montes de Maria Women's Network	Cartagena Empowerment Network	Call, facilitation and support for network management and coordination activities.	Logistical support
Montes de Maria Women's Network RECAR	Cartagena Empowerment Network	Support in social mobilization in Cartagena (public demonstrations and sit-ins)	Support for social mobilization
Cartagena Empowerment Network	Montes de Maria Women's Network	Support in social mobilization in Montes de María (public demonstrations and sit-ins)	Support for social mobilization
RECAR	REDMUCOV	Native seeds delivery and training in management and conservation of native seeds y transgenic free territories.	Training

"Through the forms we exchange experiences and reflect together in our M&E regional meetings." (Woman from Valle).

b.4 The exchange of lessons learned on political advocacy between regions reduces the learning curve

Through the exchange between different regions, a process of documentation and systematization of experiences takes place, which results in the conceptualization of different intervention strategies and their context for application, to make the actions more effective. This kind of exchange has shown to be particularly valuable for "younger" regional networks and for "older" regional networks that are taking first steps in new issues where other regions have an accumulated expertise.

The M&E system is based on an analysis of the actors to be influenced, and a planning focused on these actors. For each of the three main categories of actors (political and legal institutions; the women's social movement and public opinion / socio-cultural movement) different actor's types have been identified based on the themes of the common agenda. The women now look at their work on policy influencing as a process towards explicit behavioral changes in specific actors. These desired changes are also categorized along with their influence strategies (direct or indirect). The combination of these elements (type of actor, type of desired change, changes

achieved, actions taken, allies who contributed) provide a solid framework for data analysis and learning that can easily be shared between regions and also be summarized for national level decision making.

During 2011, the 20 local networks involved in the M&E initiative reported 49 stories of change in local actors. At regional meetings all local stories were classified by the type of actor they referred to. For the types of actor where two o more change stories were found, participants were asked to systematize their common stories in order to produce pathways for policy influence that could summarize what they have done and learnt:
- Actors ideal behavior
- Actors signals of progress
- Pathway effectiveness according to context specific circumstances
- Recommended actions and steps (DOs)
- NOT recommended actions and steps (DON'Ts)
- Ways to improve what was done

The idea of this exercise was to summarize what two or more local networks had learnt by working with a specific type of actor and to consolidate these experiences in a simple format that can guide other regions and networks trying to influence similar actors. For example, during 2011, in Valle del Cauca, in the context of political elections, 8 local networks reported local change stories on candidates running for the mayor's office. In Valle's regional M&E meeting, representatives of 8 networks worked together to discuss their experiences in the best way to engage this type of actor. The same process took place in regional meetings in Santander (6 networks) and Caribe (2 networks). At the results panel meeting, representatives from each of these 3 regions presented their regional pathways and the whole group engaged in a discussion about the differences, similarities and context specific issues identified for each pathway. Finally a consented national pathway was formulated. The following picture shows this process:
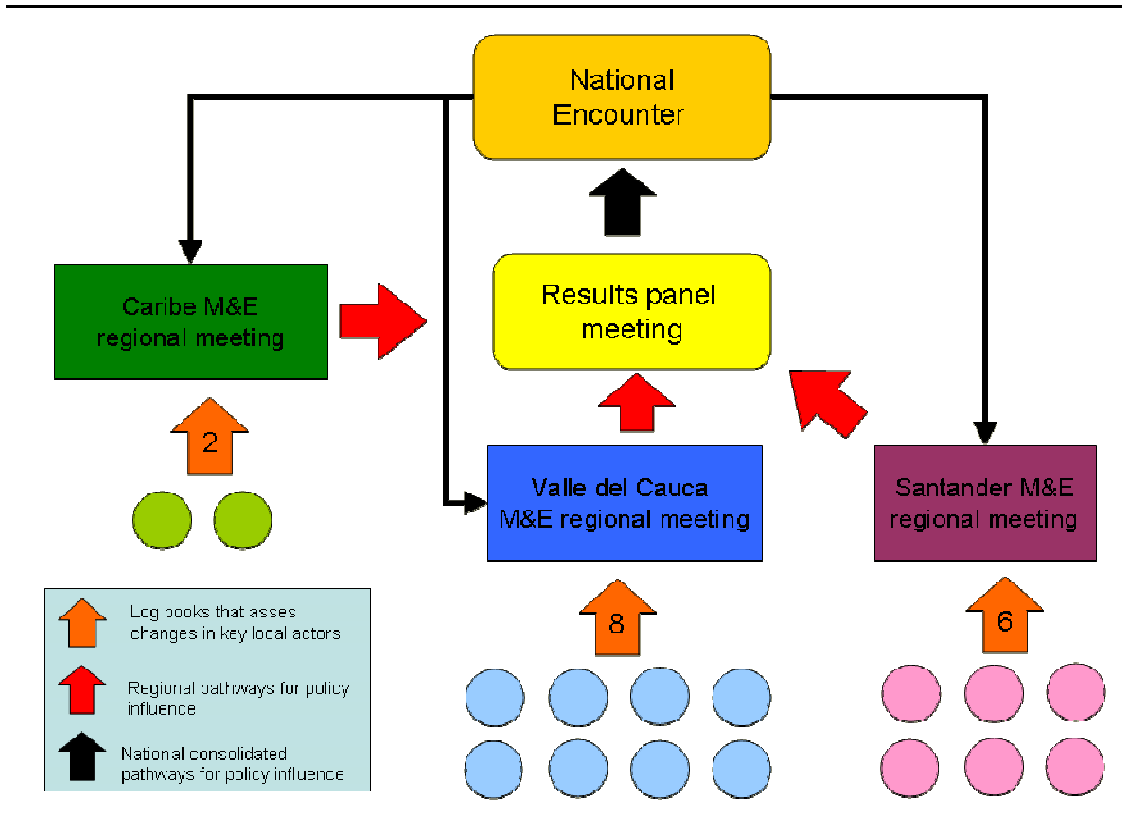
This exercise was repeated in all 3 regions. At the end 11 regional pathways of political lobby were produced, regarding 6 types of actors (mayor, commissioner, town council, public prosecutor, media, other women's organizations and networks). On the next level of analysis common regional pathways of political lobby can also be summarized, at the annual results panel meeting, to produce a national report that could collect all that was learnt at the three levels of articulation (local, regional and national). Time restrictions and unexpected emerging issues (such as the participants' uncertainties about CORDAID future support) left insufficient time at the 2011 results panel meeting to complete this exercise, but it was kept on the agenda for next year results panel meeting.

> "We now understand the function of a public servant. We now know better how to influence public servants." (Woman from Cartagena).
>
> "In the network of victims of armed conflict, we identified as a key actor the Accion Social (state program that supports internally displaced people). IDP women were very unhappy with the assistentialistic way the program was set up. We lobbied this institution, and the women now report that the program has changed its policy towards IDP women, considering their real needs, like job opportunities." (IDP Woman in Santander).

b.5 Empowerment of local networks in the multi level process

The systematization of the work done by local networks has changed their political profile within the program. There is now a growing recognition of the importance of local networks as political actors and the need to strengthen the local level of the women's social movement to gain political weight and power. It is now

recognized by the participants that a legitimate local based constituency is one of the program's most appealing feature with respect to other existing women's rights defense initiatives in Colombia. Local agendas and processes are increasingly nurturing the regional dynamics and affecting the national level in a bottom-up approach. The M&E work has contributed to empower local women and better integrate their perspectives on development towards a more comprehensive and complex picture of the context and the possible pathways of action to implement the program common agenda.

> "Before, we only met once a year in a national meeting. Now we have more regular meetings, we interrelate more; we are informed about the processes in the different regions. We are stronger now, we now work from the local to the national level. We are different from other networks, we have a more robust way of working, strong, structured. This has a great potential, we are much more visible". (woman from Santander).
>
> "The local issues have been put on the national agenda now. Before, the agenda was imposed by the national level on the local level, but there is no logic in our agenda when it is decided at the national level. We have other problems and other priorities at the local level. That is why in Santander we need to influence other actors. At the regional level we discuss the different actors we have in common. Then in the results panel at national level we see the consensus in actors. Based on that, we define the strategies to influence the actors, this may be helpful for other regions. We arrive at the national level with better arguments." (Women from Santander).

b.6 Identified knowledge gaps on technical issues related to the program action range

The collection of information and the reflection processes contributed to the identification of knowledge gaps, for instance related to the themes of the shared agenda, on the institutional actors and their formal functions. As a result of this it was proposed to develop a glossary of actors and their formal functions, related to the themes of the shared agenda. It was usually assumed that all women involved in the program had a similar level of understanding of the legal and institutional concepts related to women's rights defense in Colombia. However the monitoring process made clear that this assumption was unfunded for both local and regional levels. This verification clearly showed the need for standardizing technical concepts among participants and also the need to implement an information system that could keep the networks updated about changes on the current legislation and in particular regarding the implementation of the law 1257.

> "We used to try to influence the mayor to respond on the law 1257 (on violence against women). We found out he was the wrong actor, we made a mapping of the actors that are related to the law 1257. We discovered that the M&E tool gave us the information we needed." (Women from Cartagena).

b.7 Improved communication mechanisms to strengthen the program's internal coherence preventing that the use of information technologies does not become a mechanism of exclusion

The M&E results has led participants to recognize the importance of improving the communication and information flows within and between networks and regions. Other communication channels have been assessed (email, phone, voice over IP, text messages, online application) to improve the coordination processes and political action. In this regard several participants have raised the need for submitting project proposals or looking for funding sources that could help to improve the communication in general terms but also to reduce the existing digital divide among the existing local networks. Left unattended, this digital divide, already a barrier, risks becoming an exclusion mechanism for some of the less advanced (in terms of information technologies) local networks.

C) Satisfying downward, horizontal and upward accountability needs

c.1 Strengthening horizontal accountability leads to demand internal accountability

The exchange promoted by the process of M&E between the local and regional networks has promoted a clear horizontal accountability. This has become evident in the local networks disposition to complete M&E formats, in their active participation in M&E meetings. The spaces for gathering and analyzing information are, in themselves, ways of strengthening transparency and learning amongst the women and organizations involved in the program. The dissemination of monitoring results through the information system also contributes to this purpose. Additionally there is an increasing trend toward greater internal accountability. Also it has been proposed in some regional spaces that it is important to account for the management of funds and to share this information between the different participants to strengthen the trust (for instance in Valle and Santander). Among the group of local and regional monitoring coordinators a stricter peer to peer control is starting to take place and even some calls for attention among participants occurred for delays or failure to comply with the group agreements.

c.2 The democratization of the access to monitoring information has allowed to neutralize some dominant powers and led to a diversification of participation

The widespread use of monitoring tools on the three levels of action and the dissemination of M&E results in the regions has increased the group internal accountability which has helped offset some traditional powers by:

- Highlighting the importance and possibility of making decisions based on common available information, and not on personal opinions, prejudices or strong personal leadership;
- Making visible the contributions of various stakeholders in the program achievements;
- Establishing more democratic decision-making mechanisms that follow predefined operating rules: defining the meeting agenda together, defining an agreed time for the meetings, grant a maximum amount of time for participant's interventions, preparing and distributing summary reports and setting up follow-up of the consented agreements.

> "The strengthening of leadership has just started. I can see progress. They speak with one voice now and are definitely more visible. However the women that are leaders at local level, still feel insecure at the regional level. But we don't want the same leaders always". (Gender expert in the former government of Santander).

c.3 Promoting horizontal transparency has led to questions about the legitimacy of the networks representation

As the common agenda and the local networks involvement in the M&E grew stronger, the participants also started to perceive themselves as equals. This process has raised the issue of legitimacy in the representation and participation of the local networks in the decision making processes at both the regional and national level. Until now most of the local networks kept a low profile at the regional level that was traditionally driven by strong personal leadership or the stronger organizations (in Santander for instance, NGOs used to play a prominent role at the regional level, where now their participation is almost completely banned from the core group). To the extent that M&E results have highlighted the significant contributions of local networks to the advocacy processes, their profile within the program has been endorsed and strengthened and therefore they

now begin to demand more transparent mechanisms for the election of regional representatives, for the participation of their own representatives in the regional and national meetings and the need to equally hold the regional meetings at their localities as well as at the regional capital (traditionally regional meetings were always held in the provincial capital). The emergence of the local networks' demands was evident in several regional exercises on ideal networking and also manifested in dialogues among women in the spaces of reflection about the program networking. The M&E process has provoked a change in the program's power distribution. The program's agenda that used to be determined at the national level (almost vertically) and only approved by regional representatives, is now starting to build up from the regional level using significant inputs from the local networks.

The following table shows some examples from Caribe and Valle regional monitoring reports. The texts were taken from the ideal networking tool. Each network defined its ideal and current functioning regarding 9 different categories[16] and also graded it own progress towards the ideal situation. For the purpose of this example only the ideal situation for two categories are presented:

Valle del Cauca
1. Composition and structure (ideal functioning)
We are a network of networks, including women from urban and rural areas, youth, indigenous, afro, LBTI, and women with disabilities. We have one departmental coordinating committee; and one coordinating committee for each of the 4 sub regions of our department, to articulate and provide feedback to each other. Each municipal network has its own coordinating committee as well. Each coordinating committee has a coordinator and a support person. Coordinating committees will be elected for a period of 2 years, that may be extended to 2 additional years. If the coordination role is not fully and adequately performed, the coordinator may be replaced by the support person or in his absence by another member of the coordinating committee. Other ad-hoc work committees will be created if needed.
3. Participation, representation and decision making (ideal functioning)
Coordinating committees serve as spaces for consultation, capacity building and decision making. Decisions are based on consensus, and if not possible by vote of the representatives. The departmental coordinating committee consists of 2 to 4 dynamic sub regional representatives according to the available budget. The sub regional coordinating committees are composed of two representatives from each municipal network. The municipal coordinating committees are composed of 1 or 2 representatives from each organization. Independent women will have a voice but will not be allowed to vote. Participation and representation of the women's networks in other spaces of the women's social movement will be agreed by the departmental coordinating committee.
Caribe
1. Composition and structure (ideal functioning)
It is regional space for meeting and coordinating informal mechanisms of collaboration between networks that share the common goal of defending and promoting the rights of women (the name of this regional space remains to be defined). Other women's networks from the Caribbean that meet predefined requirements may also be part of this regional space.
3. Participation, representation and decision making (ideal functioning)

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[16] 1. Composition and structure; 2. Relations with other actors; 3. Participation, representation and decision making; 4. Communications and interactions; 5. Vision and common agenda; 6. Planning, monitoring and evaluation; 7. Performance; 8. Capacity building Development of skills and knowledge management; 9. Financial sustainability.

We assume ourselves as a collegial body composed of at least 2 local network representatives, selected by them according to agreed criteria and profiles.

"In Santander there are some tensions now. The local networks want to have more space, are questioning the role of the NGOs and of the meeting places. The meetings are always in Bucaramanga, the capital, because the urban networks are based there. The local networks now are asking the NGOs if they participate as an NGO or as representatives of the network. The discussions used to be dominated by the NGOs. Because NGO's traditionally were the facilitators and trainers of women's networks, they still tend to sit on the chair of the women" (M&E Consultant).

c.4 Using M&E outcomes to satisfy CORDAID´S accountability needs

Another important purpose is to use the M&E as a tool to link the local to the national, the regional and the international levels. *"It has been shown in various examples how the local level has been empowered by information sharing and how they have learned to claim their space and their agenda"* (Cordaid desk officer)

The larger purpose of this pilot is to re-position M&E as part of Cordaid's policies, as an accountability tool to our cause and our constituencies.

The future Business Unit 'Women Leadership for Peace and Security' will have three possible Intervention areas:

- **I. Strengthening Capacities**
M&E system based on the women's perspective and prioritizing individual and collective learning.

- **II. Networking/coalition building**
M&E system for upward and downward accountability to the CoC constituencies.

- **III. Lobby and advocacy**
M&E system to support the political agenda.

"The networks are more open towards each other in the reflection workshops about what worked and what went wrong and why" (Cordaid desk officer).

c.5 Positioning M&E as a management activity necessary for ongoing projects and project proposals

The process of review and reflection triggered by the M&E has led the participants to reconsider the M&E implementation of their ongoing projects and to introduce this subject when formulating new project proposals. The information the M&E produces has been used by the networks to negotiate with donors the requirements for evaluation and monitoring reports. Many women's organizations find the M&E frameworks of donors excessive and of no use for their own learning processes. Some participants also recognize that having been part of this experience in M&E puts them in a better position to negotiate their proposals because donors value their M&E expertise.

"When we write proposals, we are always asked to describe how we are going to monitor progress. Now we can present a very complete system. We are planning to present the information we have online as a kind of report to donors, so we do not need to write 10 reports in 10 different formats anymore". (Woman from Cartagena).

> *"To have the forms is an important input to write reports. It is helpful to write reports to the municipality to inform about the projects. We don't have a lot of experience yet with projects. It is a plus to receive funds if we have a M&E system. We have gained experience in reporting. We manage more technical words, we are more eloquent." (Women Santander).*
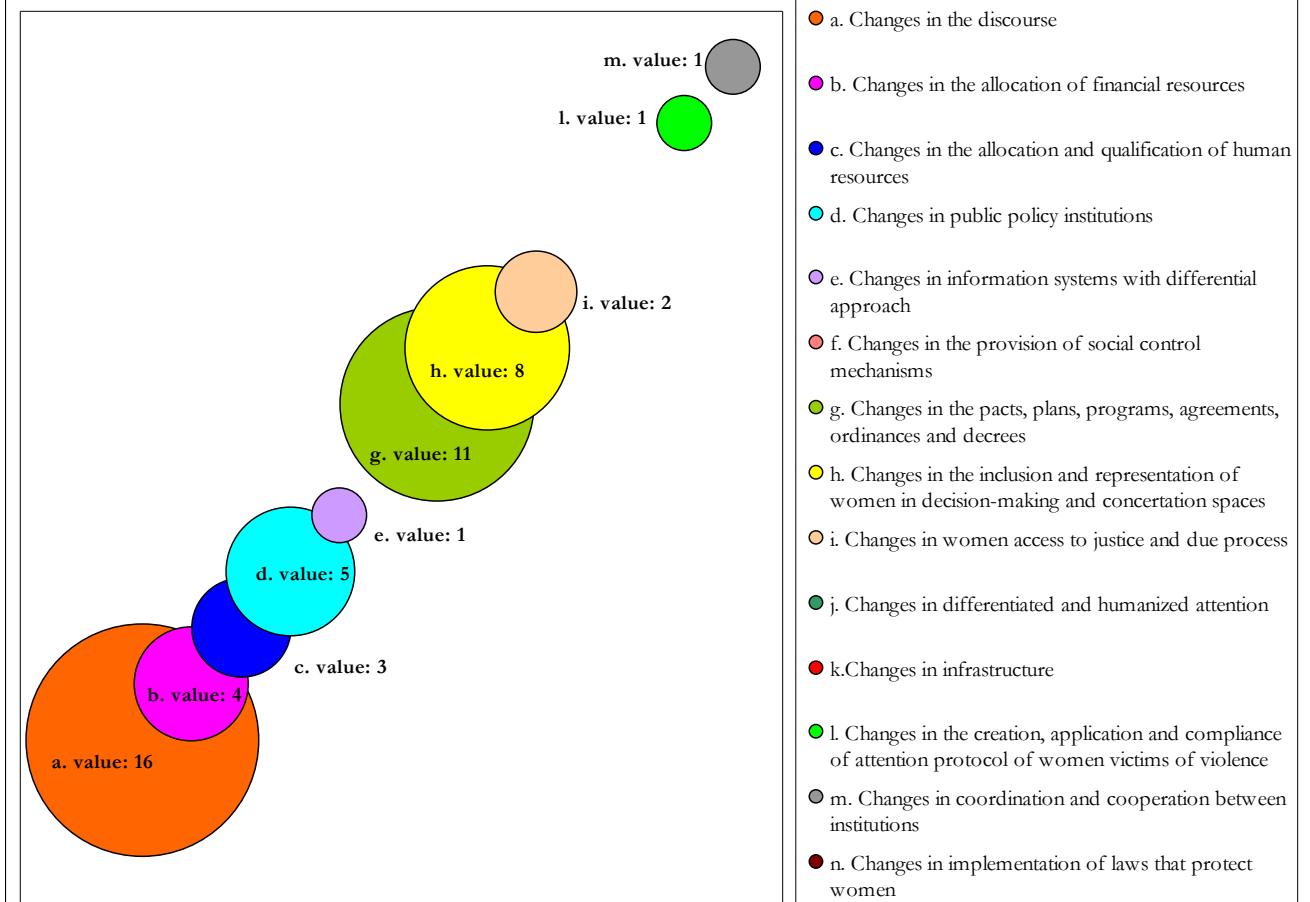
d) Adaptive capacity of the women as change agents

d.1 Moving from anecdotal thinking to conceptual analysis.

As a result of the use of the monitoring tools as well as the participation in various spaces for debate and dialogue the women have improved their reporting skills and have moved from a report style that was initially anecdotal and case-specific to a conceptual analysis (a higher level of abstraction than the simple report of actions). The application of the monitoring instruments has strengthened the capacities of the women to systematize and write down their experiences, as well as their capacities to debate and arrive to consensus and use the lessons learnt that can be replicated in other regions. This is reflected in the quality of the contents of the M&E meeting reports and also in specific exercises that require a certain level of abstraction such as the production of analysis categories (type of actors, type of changes, systematized advocacy strategies, etc).

In 2011, the 20 local networks participating in the M&E process produced 49 stories of change in key local actors, 21 from those stories were related to one type of institutional actor: the mayor. When each of the local networks reported their change stories, they described the behavioral change observed (most of these descriptions are case specific) but they also categorized these changes according to a predefined and commonly agreed categories. The process of self-categorizing what they have achieved (in terms of changes in key social actors) allowed the women to start thinking and talking in terms of a superior level of abstraction. In order to choose a proper category to classify the network's outcomes it was necessary for them to discuss and understand all existing categories and select the one that better fit what was being reported. Once all local networks had completed their classifications a new set of analysis tools could be applied. For example, for the results panel meeting, several graphs were prepared to simplify and deepen the collective data analysis. One was a graph that showed the types of changes reported by the local networks for a particular type of actor. An example of this is showed here that corresponds to the before mentioned type of actor: mayor.

1.1 Types of changes reported for institutional actors: mayors - 21 local stories

- a. Changes in the discourse
- b. Changes in the allocation of financial resources
- c. Changes in the allocation and qualification of human resources
- d. Changes in public policy institutions
- e. Changes in information systems with differential approach
- f. Changes in the provision of social control mechanisms
- g. Changes in the pacts, plans, programs, agreements, ordinances and decrees
- h. Changes in the inclusion and representation of women in decision-making and concertation spaces
- i. Changes in women access to justice and due process
- j. Changes in differentiated and humanized attention
- k. Changes in infrastructure
- l. Changes in the creation, application and compliance of attention protocol of women victims of violence
- m. Changes in coordination and cooperation between institutions
- n. Changes in implementation of laws that protect women

The graph shows how many times each type of change was selected by the local networks that reported significant changes on mayors. The size of the bubbles in the graph represents the recurrence of each type of change reported for this type of actor. So the bigger bubbles relate to the most common type of change achieved. It came as a surprise for the participants to realize that the most common changes were related to changes in the discourse (value 16) and changes in agreements, plans, programs, ordinances and decrees (value 13). Nevertheless they also recognize that these results are consistent with the context of the political elections during 2011. An interesting reflection resulted from this analysis when several participants concluded that the types of changes they were achieving with this kind of actor (mayors) were acceptable for this particular year, but that for the upcoming periods they would expect the changes in the discourse, plans, programs, agreements, ordinances and decrees; to materialize into more concrete forms of changes (i.e. changes in infrastructure, allocation of financial resources, women's access to justice and due process, etc.). The participants also concluded that the most effective course of action for the next year would be to keep a tight follow up of all the elected candidates' commitments: 2012 must be the year of bringing all those campaign promises to reality.

This kind of analysis and conclusions shows how the participants have started to perceive and understand their own work from a different perspective. The results reported at the local level changed from a case specific and

anecdotal basis to a more abstract and conceptual discussion that brought new analytical concepts that led to more adequate decisions.

d.2 Recognizing the importance of reflection meetings mobilized by self-generated questions

The women meet at least twice a year at each level (local, regional and national) and use the tools proposed by the M&E system of to guide a structured dialogue based on common information, respecting different perspectives and views about what is investigated. This in itself is a first cycle of learning. The women recognize the importance of theses M&E spaces because it allows them to assess and review the institutional actors they are trying to influence as well as the pathways and advocacy strategies they are using. Attendance and participation in these encounters have been active and passionate. The women expressed that the construction of knowledge and learning through self formulated M&E questions has been a key element in the success of this system because it has allowed the participants to express their own practice, questions and needs through it.

The significance attributed to these questions and responses is shown by the recurrent demands to share the M&E results with all the local networks. They valued these results. The single most important advantage of an M&E participatory design is that its relevance is guaranteed, therefore a virtuous cycle is set in motion: because it is relevant for the participants, ownership and commitment are promoted and so attendance and involvement occur seamlessly, which consolidates participation and thus increases its relevance.

"We are constructing the M&E program collectively, it is not yet finalized. It responds to local needs. The monitoring system was very much constructed the way the program was constructed (participatory)." (Woman from Santander).

d.3 Having a flexible planning framework that can respond to contextual changes

Given that the focus of the M&E system is the accurate identification of scenarios, actors and desired changes, it has allowed the local networks to improve their effectiveness by timely redirecting their advocacy actions in response to the multiple (and generally unexpected) contextual changes that continue to take place in Colombia. This has led the participants to devote special efforts to read and interpret the ongoing changes at the socio political level and to think how these changes are constantly affecting their work (in some extreme cases their very lives may depend on it). Fixed pre defined plans and possible solutions are useless. What has proved to be more effective is to have a flexible planning method that includes several opportunities for the networks to review their action plans and reconsider the proposed actions to influence specific actors vis-à-vis the ever changing political situation.

For example, in 2011 the provincial government and municipality elections were held. Depending on the regional context, the networks decided to follow different strategies for lobbying their candidates: some regions were able to interact directly with the candidates and convince them to sign public commitments, others had to make alliances with other sectors to gather enough political force to be considered a legitimate political speaker, again others used a strategy to approach the candidates' family (mother or wife) or their female collaborators to bring the candidates' attention to the demands of the women's movement.

The usefulness of this approach was shown in the participants' satisfaction with the application of the planning framework at the regional and national level. This encouraged local representatives to adapt the planning methodology (that was initially proposed only for regional and national spaces) and apply it at the local level as well.

> *"It is also important to recognize the influence of the political context, for instance the local elections in 2011, the changes in international cooperation. They learned to plan and agree upon the way to manage these contexts in order not to lose the articulation of their work. The women have an increasing interest to keep themselves articulated, even without the support of Cordaid". (Colombia desk officer).*

d.4 Calling attention for the program sustainability and the personal safety of women human rights defenders

The context in Colombia is continuously changing. The armed forces are changing their strategies and geographic target areas permanently. Attacks on women community leaders and women human rights defenders are becoming stronger as the women's movement is growing stronger and more visible. The women have to adjust their strategies with the changing conjuncture. The M&E system helps them to react faster and in a more strategic way in front of these emerging threats. If needed, the information system will also allow the networks to mobilize their constituencies faster.

Shifting toward a more analytic and strategic way of planning and executing their work has also opened the issue of the importance of economic sustainability at a personal level and also as a program: the self protection, and the security of the participants in the network, in order to guarantee the sustainability of their work. Changes in the international cooperation and particularly within Cordaid have not gone unnoticed. Evidence of this is the increasing concern of the participants about the program's future and the time they devote to this issue in the M&E meetings. These discussions led them to decide to keep functioning as a program even if Cortaid's leaves the program.

e) Ownership of the program

e.1 Documenting what has been achieved serves to comprehend the process and strengthens the sense of identity of the program

The efforts of the women in documenting their work, have been highly valued as it enables them to become aware of the travelled path, the accumulated successes and also enables them to identify lessons learnt. The results of this learning process are starting to become evident in the adjustments and changes in the way the networks are developing their new action plans.

Becoming aware of the overall program's achievements served as an important motivation for the future work. Through this process growing appreciation of the program's identity is taking place. Participants become aware that this process does not respond merely to an opportunity prompted by available cooperation funds, or a thematic fashion, but that their joint effort responds to the felt needs, convictions and possibilities of the women in their particular contexts. Participants consistently show an attitude of affirmation of their personal beliefs and their emotional ties to the program's agenda. Documenting and disseminating the collective successes and achievements serve as an emotional fuel for all participants from all regions.

This renewed commitment is evidenced by the continued and motivated work of the local and regional networks (despite the lack of funds) to ensure the inclusion of their demands in the development plans, as well as in the joint efforts to design new project proposals and to look for alternative funding with other donors.

> *"There is more identification with the program, a collective identity. It is clear what our objectives are as a program, we can visualize what we do. Before this was not evident."* (Mujer de Santander).
>
> *"Applauding our success is part of reaffirming what we are doing and pushes us to continue"* (M&E Consultant).
>
> *"No woman here lives of this (process), here we live for this".* (Women from the Antioquia).

e.2 Having the same access to knowledge increases the sense of belonging and ownership of local networks

The process of M&E has collected stories of change and evidence of the work done by the program members, particularly highlighting the leading role of local networks, who used to contribute only a small fraction to the overall program efforts and achievements. This has led to more ownership by the participants who report having greater clarity about what their contribution is to the broad process and how important all these single contributions are. As accumulated knowledge increases and gets more specific, the sense of belonging and leadership of all participants also improves as they gain clarity about the process within their networks and about the issues that emerge from emphasizing the multi level articulation: defining a common agenda, members' roles, actual and symbolic power of the actors involved (internal and external), better understanding of possible pathways of political lobby. The participants state that this kind of information empowers them to a more informed participation within their local networks as well as for the advocacy work they carry on in their localities.

Those who participated in the design and pilot phase mentioned that this experience allowed them to "get to know the other women who make up the Core Group, and agree together on what they want to achieve". This goes beyond generating a common agenda and entails a "process of reflection that leads to building identities".

> *"Through the online system we realized that we form a regional network. Now we are developing our own logo as a regional network. We are excited about that".* (Women from the Caribe).
>
> *"Very interesting is the fact that the network in Santander region is defending her ownership over the way they organized themselves in a Community of Change. They have acquired the concept, adapted it to their own reality, taking decisions about who's in and who's out. Who are the strategic allies and who are the opposing forces that need to be influenced. They don't care if Cordaid has another opinion. That is real ownership".* (Colombia desk officer).

e.3 Create the conditions to enable the participation of young women, women from ethnic groups and women with incipient educational levels

Through the ME process the women get a better understanding of the common agenda, the roles and behavior of different actors and the ways to bring about change. Being able to access and understand this information enables women to take an active role in the network, which strengthens their leadership. More young women, women from ethnic groups and less educated women started participating actively, not only at the local level but also at the regional and even at the national level, since they understand better the function and roles of the networks, that used to be dominated by theoretical and abstract discourses of highly educated, feminist activists.

> *"In every municipality there is a network, but the development of the networks is not equal. The monitoring forms have contributed to everybody's participation, even if they don't know how to read." (Woman from Santander).*
>
> *"The monitoring has increased our capacities to use arguments. It has contributed to the strengthening of capacities and the emergence of new leadership. It used to be always the same persons who, as feminist activists, had gained their part in the history of the women's movement, which gave them an exclusive and dominant position. Now other women take over this role (young women, uneducated women, rural women). The monitoring has contributed, because there are written materials now that we all have access to. So the old feminists are not the only ones anymore to have access to information. Local women are equally empowered, strengthened and capacitated to use the same arguments. We now have commonly understood histories. It is a work of giving meaning to the experiences lived. The stories tell us: What did we do? Why did we do it? It is giving a meaning to what we did. Was what we did the best we could do? Could we have made other decisions? It helped to balance the unequal situation of young women vis-à-vis the established feminists." (Women in Santander).*
>
> *" The strengthening of leadership has just started. I can see progress. They speak with one voice now and are definitely more visible. However the women that are leaders at local level, still feel insecure at the regional level. But we don't want the same leaders always " (Gender expert in the former government of Santander).*

f) Usefulness for other CoCs

Lessons learned from this process:
- Make M&E part of a learning agenda, not an add-on at the end of a three year grant.
- M&E as a participatory process.
- Balance between quantitative and qualitative assessments
- Design M&E to fit the CoC model.
- Invest resources in developing M&E capacity

f.1 Participatory design of an M&E system able to answer the questions of those who operate it

The collective construction of knowledge and learning through central learning questions was the central approach in the M&E design. The continuous collection of the answers to these questions is an important source for reflection, analysis and decision making.

To a large extent the success of the M&E system has been its ability to recognize and meet the concerns and interests of its users. The whole system is designed, in the first place, to answer the questions that the users have raised. Experience shows that it is also possible to add M&E questions related to the interests of other actors (eg donors) but giving priority to the need for information of the people who will operate the system substantially increases its usefulness, relevance and effectiveness.

f.2 Collect only the information that will be analyzed and used for decision making

At the beginning of the pilot phase, the system had information gathering tools that were very long, heavy and tiresome to complete. As the process advanced these tools were reduced and simplified. The selection criteria used for determining what to eliminate and what to keep was the following: if we are not going to have sufficient time for participatory analysis of the collected data, it is better not to ask for it at all. It is better to concentrate efforts on gathering fewer inputs of optimum quality and be sure to have enough time for data analysis and decision-making. Participants report that this decision encouraged them to dedicate more time to M&E because it showed that the M&E design was respectful of their time. It also has allowed them to participate and therefore they clearly see how the complete cycle occurs: reporting / analyzing / learning / decision-making.

f.3 Operating the M&E system as a flexible rather than a predesigned system

The monitoring system was conceived as a process on the job rather than *a* predefined design to be implemented. Once it has ran a full cycle, complexity can easily be increased (if needed) by adding more M&E questions and modifying the necessary tools. Initially, the process of monitoring itself is more important than the outcomes its produces. In order to position the M&E system (which was completely new for most of the women) and to strengthen the program's evaluation culture it was preferable to focus on the process itself. This enabled the participants to experience a complete M&E cycle for themselves, recognizing their contributions throughout the process. Given the complex context and the participants' skills, starting with a complex predefined design of the M&E would possibly have led to a frustrating and alienating implementation process.

> *"We wanted the women to learn by experience and in order to consolidate this system we knew that we needed them to emotionally connect with the process. Favoring practice over thoroughness was a great way to engage the group. Once the women were convinced of its usefulness it was easy to start adding complexity layers. The other way around may not have worked at all." (M&E Consultant).*

f.4 Clear evidence connects the collected information with its use

All information collected should eventually lead to learning and ideally to decision making about new emerging issues. The information collected that remains unclear for the participants is a disincentive (in the eyes of the participants it appears to be a pointless task). When in doubt less is always better. Having less information, allows for emphasis on quality and allocating time for analysis. Participants reported early in the process that the previous experiences they had with M&E systems were frustrating, mostly because they felt that they were as a "black hole" (i.e. information moved only in one way). The lack of appropriate feedback mechanisms eventually led to information not being used at all.

> *"Unprocessed collected data can become a serious threat for the M&E implementation and institutionalization. When participants start noticing that a significant part of the data they collect and report is not used at all, they start losing confidence in the process. Asking for information and not being able to provide adequate feedback is something we always try to avoid." (M&E Consultant).*