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**Preventing culture from eating strategy**

**Presenting Authors**

Peggy Ochandarena1, and Dr. Alexandra Brewis2

**Affiliation**

1. Global Impact Collaboratory, Chemonics International, inc, DC
2. Global Impact Collaboratory, Arizona State University

**Country of residence**

Palestine; United States of America

**Objectives/aims**

Peter Drucker said “Culture eats strategy for breakfast.” Understanding culture is essential to effective strategies that impact policy, programs, and practice in international development, particularly for designing interventions that are sensitive to beliefs and values about gender. Gender assessments are frequently done at the outset of projects, typically by consulting sources *other* than hard-to-reach vulnerable populations; often data is obtained primarily through document reviews and key informant interviews that reflect the perspectives and opinions of an educated segment of the population. We will describe how we used the cultural consensus model (CCM) as a cost-effective measure to validate gender assumptions and conclusions in marginalized communities. We will present how we used this method to test assumptions about gender-based violence in general and femicide in the name of “family honor” in particular, sharing how we identified cultural statements from program documents, assembled the survey, trained local staff to administer it, our findings, and how the evidence was used in activity design.

**Methods**

Anthropologists use the cultural consensus method to elicit information in a specific cultural domain and assess variation within that domain and within subgroups. This method has broader utility for international development program designers and evaluators who use it to identify cultural norms, beliefs, and values central to program objectives. It is much less resource-intensive to apply compared to traditional household surveys that require random sampling methods; it uses a convenience sample and the survey instrument is shorter, typically requiring 15-20 minutes to administer. This cost-effective method yields valuable insights about culture that must be factored into program interventions.

**Main findings**

Applied in a USAID-funded program in the West Bank, the use of the cultural consensus method revealed that some motives for gender-based violence and femicide hide behind the excuse of protecting “family honor” which absolves men of stigma for harming women and carries lighter legal penalties. One such motivation is to discourage or punish women who do not waive their right to inheritance, as a married woman’s property becomes her husband’s property and thus the woman’s family loses ownership of the inherited property. The cultural consensus method was useful to identify cultural beliefs and thus discover risks for women that might be increased due to project interventions. For example, interventions intended to facilitate legal procedures for women to claim their right to inherit and to raise public awareness of these procedures had to be altered to mitigate the unintended consequence of the risk of increasing violence against women.