



What we learned from co-designing the methodology on women's entrepreneurship

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In Senegal, women's entrepreneurship remains hampered by systemic barriers, including limited access to finance, markets and networks, as well as socio-cultural norms that perpetuate gender discrimination. According to the 2016 General Business Census, 31.3% of businesses are owned by women. Women are less likely than men to start a business. These statistics, which date from 2016, while valuable for diagnostic purposes, require updating to remain a relevant tool for analysis and decision-making. In a context where public authorities recognize that access to and use of rigorous, disaggregated data is essential to accurately define public policies, IPAR Think tank is initiating a data synthesis aimed at strengthening the production and use of evidence in decision-making processes to develop women's entrepreneurship and strengthen their economic empowerment. In this process, the construction of the methodology constitutes a decisive step. An ambitious methodological exercise was conducted through two successive workshops and bilateral meetings. These meetings enabled us to experiment with a methodological approach that was both collaborative and iterative.

1. A collaborative approach rooted in the data ecosystem

Right from the first workshop held on February 21, 2025, the method we adopted stood out for its collaborative mapping involving various ministries, technical agencies and institutional partners. This approach fostered collective ownership of the project, and enabled us to position stakeholders as co-producers and users of data, beyond the simple status of key informants. The structures represented are considered to be data producers or users (ANSD, DAPSA, ministries, etc.).

The co-construction of tools (mapping grids of data needs, available databases and players) introduced a dynamic that consolidated the methodological approach. It enabled researchers' expectations to be matched with institutional realities, while reinforcing exchanges on relevant data and on the specific realities of women entrepreneurs operating in male-dominated fields. Right from the first workshop, key institutional players - ministries, technical agencies, entrepreneurship support structures - were involved in the construction of the tools, notably the base mapping, the data collection grid and the questionnaire.

- **Three guides to structure an approach**

The development of three guides helped to organize the methodological reflection around:

- Mapping the need for data on women's entrepreneurship;
- Mapping existing databases with their strengths and weaknesses;
- Mapping the stakeholders in the data ecosystem.

This triple entry point facilitated a multidimensional reading of the problem, clearly distinguishing the roles of each entity (producers, intermediaries, decision-makers), while identifying the gaps to be filled. However, their appropriation was uneven:

- Some structures were able to fill them in upstream, providing valuable data;
- Others, absent from the first workshop or simply less prepared, did not complete the grids.

To complete the information and provide a more precise mapping, a questionnaire has been presented to gather information on available data and needs. This will be the main mapping tool, and will be administered to at least thirty structures.

One of the first lessons to be learned from this process of methodological co-construction is that stakeholder's adhesion is built more effectively when they are fully involved in the development of the tools, rather than confined to the role of mere data providers. However, the introduction of technical tools for collecting information requires sustained dialogues, including repeated working sessions to facilitate understanding and collection.

2. Iteration and inclusion as methodological principles

The process structured in successive stages (starting with a scoping workshop on the project's broad outlines and methodology, followed by a second workshop for feedback and consolidation, bilateral meetings) was a particularly wise and relevant methodological choice in view of the project's objectives. This approach favored:

- Greater ownership of the project by the partners;
- An initial collection of relevant data;
- A willingness to share data.

The iterative nature of the approach enabled us not only to take into account feedback from participants, but also to integrate new stakeholder into the process. The workshops highlighted and discussed the importance of considering all actors in the data ecosystem. The data production chain includes:

- Producers;
- Intermediaries;
- Users/decision-makers.

Mapping the roles and relationships between data actors is an essential step in building a coherent strategy for data collection and use. This iterative methodology offers flexibility in the appropriation of the tools by partner structures that become involved along the way.

The discussions also helped bring to light dimensions that had previously been little or not at all explored in existing data:

- Women's agricultural entrepreneurship and its specificities

- The inclusion of persons with disabilities in entrepreneurship support mechanisms;
- The inclusion of gender-based violence in databases.

These concerns reinforce the idea that a database useful for public decision-making must reflect diversity, key sectors and specific constraints of marginalized groups, and provide the means to correct them. This leads us to draw the following lesson: understanding women's entrepreneurship requires methodological robustness that also encompasses a transformative integration of social inclusion dimensions and to have a comprehensive vision of empowerment.

3. Steps to remove obstacles to data sharing

During the discussions, the main challenges that constantly came up were: the weak culture of data sharing, difficult access to certain databases, under-representation of certain ministries or of certain gender-specific dimensions.

A co-construction approach to developing solutions was suggested. Beyond broadening the range of partners, it was strongly recommended to identify a facilitating ministry to support IPAR in its engagement with other government ministries. The Ministry of Family, with which IPAR has established an initial partnership, could play this facilitating role. Discussions during the two workshops also highlighted that a well-designed data collection system relies as much on technical rigor as on relational dynamics. By investing in co-construction, sectoral anchoring, an ecosystemic approach and inclusiveness, it is possible to produce useful data that can be used to strengthen women's entrepreneurship. This methodology, still under construction, is learning-oriented. It is one stage in the "learning" process, enabling us to capitalize on ongoing learning and adjust our approaches as the project evolves.