Women’s Rights, Citizenship and Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa Training Institute

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Final Technical Report

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A. Research Problem and Rationale

This programme was devised as a response to two developments in the past quarter of a century. The first development is the decline of higher education institutions in Africa, and the second the rising importance of gender equality in the development frameworks and political rhetoric of postcolonial governments. Underpinning this programme is a concern that there is insufficient analysis of the nature of gender relations (in all their diversity) in Africa, the lack of a sufficiently strong information base of which to base that understanding, and a poorly developed set of analytical skills among African researchers to make a global impact of the implications of gender inequalities in Africa. As a consequence, African feminists have a tough task when it comes to defining the central research questions and making policy interventions.

The problem emerged clearly in early discussions between 2007 and 2009 between Pamela Golah, then programme manager at the IDRC, and feminist scholars at Wits. In her various attempts to support gender research in Africa, Golah found that the number of high quality research proposals emanating from Africa was low, and that despite an active search for good projects these were thin on the ground. In other words, even where funding was available to researchers, African researchers did not compete well against researchers from other parts of the world. We spent many hours discussing how this might be addressed, and jointly pinpointed what we saw to be the key blockage: the lack of well trained women (particularly feminist) researchers. More specifically, we were concerned about the historical legacy of years of treating African researchers as field workers in large donor-funded projects, rather than as the intellectual drivers of projects.

The reasons for the latter development are varied. In general, we can isolate some key factors.

1. The effects of structural adjustment on higher education in Africa

African universities went through a thriving period of expansion after decolonisation, both in the number of institutions as well as in the number of students. The largest concentrations of students were in Egypt and South Africa, followed by Nigeria, Algeria and Morocco (Zeleza). Access to universities differed for women and men, with gender parity declining steeply as students moved from secondary to tertiary education. Enrollment also varied by area of study, with women being concentrated in social sciences and humanities. (Zeleza) African universities were hard hit by the budgetary cutbacks following structural adjustment in the 1980s, a period in which the World Bank argued that the returns to investment were higher in primary education than in tertiary education. Financial support for libraries, laboratories and scholarships declined leading to a rapid erosion of the capacity for African universities to sustain themselves as the institutions for nurturing critical, independent thought.

The cut-back in funding for universities led, over a period of at least thirty years, to intellectual migration, with academics leaving the continent in search of study opportunities and careers abroad. Most young people did not return to their home countries. Although comprehensive statistics are not available, in a study published in 1999 Pires et al show that younger scholars were less likely to return home than older scholars who left families and responsibilities behind when they went abroad. They did not find significant differences in the return rate on the basis of gender, but in their survey sample only 19% of PhD recipients were women. (Pires, M., Kassimir, R. and Brhane, M. 1999. *Investing in Return: Rates of Return of African Ph.D.'s Trained in North America.* New York: Social Science Research Council)

The downstream effects of this migration are significant and compound over time. Johan Mouton refers to the “devastating secondary brain drain - not at the level of scholars and scientists but at the level of post-graduate students”. At postgraduate level, the lack of expertise to supervise high-level research, and in many universities the simple lack of masters
and doctoral programmes, led to an exodus of young students abroad. Mouton points out that increasing numbers of students from African countries do not study in their home country any more. More than 205,000 students from Sub-Saharan Africa studied outside their home countries in 2006, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, and around 70% of them went to North America or Western Europe. For most of the rest, South Africa is increasingly the destination of choice, and in 2007 there were some 60,000 international students in this country, representing 8% of the total student population.


In Western Europe, the UK and France are the preferred destinations. France attracts the most postgraduate students from Africa, at 34% of the total Africa students studying outside of their home countries. Viewed from the perspective of France, 75% of those from developing countries undertaking doctorates in France come from Africa. (c. 1,500 per year) and a significant number remain there after gaining their doctorate (Barre and Meyer, Scientific Diasporas, Paris: IRD (2003) p.1329. In the United Kingdom, approximately 3500 postgraduate students in British universities in 2003/4 were from Africa. (Universities UK Patterns of Higher Education Institutions in the UK, p.31)

A Regional Report on Sub-Saharan Africa compiled by Johann Mouton (2007) examines the effect of this brain drain on Africa. His statistics make for disturbing reading. He points out (p.24) that of the 150 million migrants in the world, over 50 million are from Africa. “The extent of human capital outflow from Africa has been described as staggering.” He estimates that up to 30% of African scientists are lost to the brain drain; indeed there are African scientists and engineers in the US than in the whole of Africa. Between 33 and 55% of the highly educated people of Angola, Burundi, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania live in OECD countries.


These statistics demonstrate that there is only a small likelihood that trained African scholars will choose to use their skills in their home countries. Indeed, training itself has the perverse consequence that it can become a route for immigration. From a gender perspective, the analysis above explains why women are in scarce supply in the research environment: not only were women likely to be in under-funded areas in the universities, but they were also less likely to be able to migrate abroad in search of educational opportunities.

2. Growth in postgraduate enrollments in Africa

A closer reading of the statistics suggests that there is a resurgence in investment in higher education in the last decade, albeit uneven.

South African universities perform most strongly in Africa with regard to numerical and qualitative statistics. 80% of basic research conducted in Southern Africa is produced by scholars based in South African universities. Several South African universities feature in the top 1% of the world’s institutions and postgraduate enrolments have increased since the installation of democracy, rising from 70,000 in 1995 to around 120,000 in 2007. Completion rates are low, however: in 2007 only 7.2% of students enrolled in Masters and PhD programmes graduated.

http://www.ieasa.studysa.org/resources/Study_SA/Facts_Figures_section.pdf
Female postgraduate enrolments show that female students constitute slightly more than 50% of all Honours enrolments, but less than half at the Masters (46% in 2005) and Doctoral (40% in 2005) levels. Although female graduates constitute significant proportions of the graduates in the Social Sciences, this is the exception. In all other fields and for both Masters and Doctoral degrees, female graduates are vastly in the minority.

South Africa is growing as an attractive option for African students. About 25% of all doctoral graduates in South Africa are not from that country, according to the Council on Higher Education, and around one in 10 postgraduate students are foreign. Out of the total doctoral degrees gained across the SADC region’s public universities in 2008, 1 274 graduated from South African institutions. SADC’s other 43 state-funded universities produced only 143 PhDs between them (Mouton).

On the continent more widely, enrollments are uneven. At the University of Ibadan, for example, the percentage of postgraduate students increased from 18 percent of the total student population in 2001 to 35 percent in 2006. Other institutions, however, are registering declining rates. At the University of Ghana, for example, the proportion of postgraduate students reduced from 14 percent in 2000 to 7 percent in 2008. Postgraduate enrollment at Makerere University dropped from 7 percent to 5 percent between 2006 and 2007, while only 3 percent of students at the Catholic University of Mozambique, in 2008, were postgraduates. The percentage of postgraduate enrollment remains relatively low in all countries—15 percent in South Africa, 7 percent in Nigeria, and 4 percent in Ghana.

With regard to gender distribution in enrollments, apart from South African institutions, which are close to gender parity in postgraduate enrollments, the rest of the continent is characterized by male dominance. In 2006, only 30 percent of the 182 doctoral graduates at the University of Ibadan were female. Only 34 percent of postgraduate degrees awarded at the University of Dar es Salaam went to females. At the latter university, the proportion of women postgraduates dropped from 35 percent to 27 percent between 2002 and 2007. At the University of Ghana, females made up only 25 percent of postgraduate enrollments in 2000, growing to 33 percent in 2008.

3. Supervisory Capacity

In South Africa in terms of university faculty, 43% of academic staff in 2007 were women, concentrated at the lower end of the academic scale. In SADC as a whole, a total of 8 441 academic and research staff hold PhD degrees. When South Africa is excluded, the figure drops by 65 percent to 3 747. Many countries are worse off than others. Zambia has only 12 doctoral graduates teaching in the SET subjects, while Madagascar has 340. The low-population Namibia has 33 PhD SET academics, but the high-population DRC has only 107. This generates a general academic climate that is not conducive to the production of PhDs.

The IAU Sub-Saharan study focuses on six universities, one each in Cameroon, Nigeria, Benin and Senegal in West Africa, and Kenya and Rwanda on the eastern side of the continent. Unlike in the SADC region, where growth (particularly in South Africa) has been steady but small (just over 6 percent), these universities have experienced what the study report calls
graduates in 2007 was 58/42 in favour of males. The six universities are: Kenyatta University in Kenya; National University of Rwanda; University of Douala in Cameroon; University Gaston Berger in Senegal; University of Ilorin in Nigeria; Université des Sciences et Technologie du Benin. (Mouton)

3. Under-development of critical skills in social sciences and the humanities: Effects of external funding

For those people working within the field of poverty reduction, development and equitable growth it is evident that the kinds of critical skills offered by social sciences and the humanities is vital. Policy-making is not simply a technical, rationale exercise that ought to be left to economists and engineers; rather, the ways in which problems are framed, the extent of voice and participation of all parts of society in developing policy priorities and the development of features of democracy itself all have an impact on policy development. The under-development of disciplines in social sciences and the humanities thus has a direct impact on and country’s policy conversations.

From this point of view, it would be useful to examine how donor funding has evolved in Africa. Mouton documents the quantity and nature of donor support to higher education in Africa and identifies the following trends. In the first generation of funding (1970s to about 1990) the weight of support was for agriculture and health sciences, followed in the second generation by support research into diseases (HIV/ AIDS and malaria in particular). The first social science discipline to be supported was economics, in the 1990s. It was only in the ‘third generation’ of funding from 2005 onwards, that that research initiatives in social sciences and humanities begin to get significant support, and even then the World Bank calculates this as being at approximately 7% of all funding. http://events.aau.org/userfiles/file/corevip11/presentations/state_of_dotoral_training.pdf

One significant trend in donor support to Africa is the promotion of gender equality as a goal in major international conventions and commitments, which translated into support for governments to meet targets for equity. On the positive side, the number of women enrolled in postgraduate education has grown phenomenally.

While these global priorities have been extremely favourable for women’s organisations and NGOs on the continent to sustain themselves, their effect on agenda-setting has been more complicated. Where women’s studies programmes have developed in African universities, they have been conceived within the framework of the importance of women to development. Women’s studies courses are less theoretically driven than their equivalents in the North America or Europe, and the emphasis of their training models tends to be instrumentalist: how to measure equality in relation to measures such as the HDI, the development of ‘gender expertise’ and a familiarity with the formulaic models of gender and development. More and more short courses on gender and development have proliferated in African universities, in order to meet the demand for government bureaucrats who can work within the national gender machineries. http://agi.ac.za/sites/agi.ac.za/files/fa_1_feature_article_3.pdf

4. Political context

Funding trends explain one part of the problem. Political trends explain another. War and conflicts have affected the stability of institutions of higher education in many parts of the continent. The interests of elites in maintaining political privileges resulted in a contraction of
spaces for independent intellectual activities that might be seen to be challenging of existing power arrangements or that could be considered to be friendly to ‘foreign’ interests.

The combined effects have been severe. As academic salaries dropped, academics were forced to supplement their incomes through consultancy work. Consultancy work was driven by the needs of foreign research agencies or by the developmental needs identified by governments. Independent critical scholarship, once the hallmark of institutions such as Makerere University and the University of Dar-es-Salaam, declined. Increasingly the research output of African-based academics became descriptive and derivative. The effect, unintended, was to devalue theory-building work initiated by Africans. Although the consequences for building a vibrant academy are important and increasingly recognised by commentators (although not necessarily by governments) the impact on policy related research is less often noted. For our purposes, the significant outcome is that the identification of development problems by Africans, based on self-identified analysis and research, is thin. It is more likely that development and governance research is of the ‘cookie-cutter’ variety, with little attention to the needs and interests of local communities and relatively few theoretical pathways to sustainable outcomes.

Zeleza argues that the lack of research infrastructure (strong research centres with a critical mass, sustained funding and institutional continuity) affects the development of research in the long term. “Scholars end up engaging in projects that do not convert into building institutional capacity. Research is very rarely linked to the work of other scholars or doctoral students (of which there are few anyway). It tends not to be accumulative over time and does not culminate in the building of a research programme or centre of excellence that can act as a platform for future research and post-graduate training.” (Zeleza)
B. The Wits/IDRC Women’s Rights and Citizenship Institute

1. Aims of the WRC Institute

The overall project objective was to provide support to feminist researchers based in Africa to conceptualize and plan research projects in the field of women's rights, citizenship and governance.

Specifically, we aimed:

- to build the capacity for theory building among gender researchers on the African continent
- to facilitate the development of younger researchers and enable the emergence of new voices in gender research
- to facilitate comparative learning between countries in Africa
- to enhance tools for effective policy advocacy and policy making
- to reinforce existing research networks and where possible expand these networks of gender researchers

In our conceptualization of the programme, we were working on the explicit assumption that the proposals that were developed would feed into the IDRC’s funding strategies, and that they would compete on their own merits in open competition with other project proposals. We hoped through the process that this would a) increase the number of good proposals reaching the IDRC by at least three (out of the five teams in each round) and thereby increase incrementally the number of good research projects supported by the IDRC.

In a unique development for South Africa, we added on an Institute in French, to reach francophone African researchers. Our motivation was two-fold. Firstly, we hoped to break through the traditional Anglophone/ francophone divisions on the continent and hoped to build new sets of networks. Secondly, we were keen to develop existing skills in South Africa and at Wits particularly; a surprisingly large number of faculty were able to cross the linguistic divide. This innovation also brought francophone scholars from North, East and West Africa together, offering new opportunities for collaboration where they had previously been limited.

2. Why emphasise the proposal as the mode of training?

In planning this project, we drew on our long history of supervision at Wits (between us Sheila Meintjes and Shireen Hassim have graduated close to 60 postgraduate students). In our view, the research proposal is the cornerstone of effective research. It encapsulates the key skills that are required to produce excellent critical research: the identification of important questions for research, the ability to distinguish between ‘researchable’ (i.e. potentially answerable) and non-researchable questions, the ability to design a feasible methodology, and an awareness of the practical aspects of conducting research (such as access to resources, fieldwork, etc). From this perspective, focusing on the proposal is the research version of the biblical maxim ‘give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.’ Even if these particular proposals did not secure funding (as most did not), we are confident that the process itself would continue to be valuable in modeling the conceptual and methodological steps necessary in research.

The research proposal also provided the ideal vehicle to focus the institute in the context of the limited time that we could interact with participants. Unlike postgraduate degrees where students are committed full-time to a year or more of extensive work, our constraint was to maximize the ‘hothouse’ effect of an intensive short course. The proposal development
exercises enabled us to combine both theory reading and methodological skills around a coherent outcome.

We had the great advantage of being able to offer research teams the incentive of a generous seed grant to develop the proposal. This enabled a range of research activities including purchasing books and database programmes, running pilot studies and enabling members of the team to visit fieldwork sites and assess feasibility of the research design.

3. Recruitment

The Institute was advertised through a range of channels and networks including a variety of websites and electronic media.

Potential applicants were sent an application package that contained elaboration of the kinds of research themes appropriate for the competition, as well as the requirements for application. Although we were not requiring the development of proposals within the existing IDRC themes (particularly as these do change), it made sense for us to work within the broad sets of issues that have been identified by IDRC programmes.

Over the course of the three years we received over 500 expressions of interest in the Institute. All of these received an application package. This translated into approximated 120 applications from a relatively diverse set of countries. The programme director and co-director shortlisted this down for the Advisory Committee selection process. The criteria used for shortlisting were:

- extent to which the research idea was interesting, innovative and/or necessary;
- the feasibility of the study,
- the composition of the research team (specifically levels of prior expertise) and
- the potential for development.

The Advisory Committee then made a selection based on criteria mutually agreed at the selection meeting, and somewhat more comprehensive than those used for shortlisting. The scoring sheet (attached) identified the following markers: research idea, research plan, expertise and feasibility, team composition, potential for growth, and possibility for feminist research, as opposed to gender research. Each proposal was looked at in turn and scored individually; the scores were then compared and a ‘short shortlist’ compiled which comprised each Committee member’s top five teams.

For the 2009 selection, it was agreed that it would be desirable for research teams to be selected from countries that had not been part of WRC’08, although this should not preclude the inclusion of a strong team. The WRC ’10 broadened the scope of recruitment into North Africa and specifically identified issues of women living under Muslim Law. However, diversity of participation was considered to be a strong factor in selection, as this would spread the developmental aspect of the programme.

A key lesson learnt with regard to recruitment was that we generally lacked sufficient information about the teams. For example, although we had information about educational background and also a concept note to assess the kinds of research ideas being presented, we had no means of assessing the precise levels of expertise of each team member. Also, although we received letters of institutional support for each team, we might have asked for a more precise commitment from host institutions about the amount of time-release they would provide for team members to work on their proposals. As I will discuss in the section on mentoring, balancing the project with other paid work was a major problem for many participants.
The composition of teams presenting for selection showed that there is clearly a ‘missing middle’ in the community of researchers across the continent – confirming the statistical information provided above in this report. Team leaders were most likely to be older academics with young researchers as junior team members. We found almost no applications led by mid-career academics or NGO-based researchers, with some body of research behind them but looking for a kick-start to thinking about the intersection between feminism and policy in more ambitious terms (this would have been our ideal candidate). We were interested in whether this pattern was a consequence of a hierarchical academic culture – that researchers were either not allowed to, or were discouraged from, submitting applications with support from senior faculty, or alternatively whether senior researchers were taking the lead in identifying opportunities and mentoring junior researchers. Our assumption was the latter, although as I will detail below we found that it was more complicated.

Although we encouraged applications that partnered advocacy and research NGOs, with university based researchers, we received only a small number of such applications and we found that NGO-based researchers had greater difficulty with assigning time for proposal development. This was slightly different in the francophone areas, where we detected an interesting overlap between academic and NGO association. The Moroccan team that was selected came from an independent research NGO, but were all three based at universities. We also chose a team from the Centre National de Recherche en Anthropologie Sociale et Culturelle in Oran, Algeria.

The role of men in research teams was discussed, and the Advisory Committee agreed that a blanket ban on male applicants for the Institute was not desirable. All-male teams were, however, excluded. It was felt that equipping women to work in teams with difficult men would be very helpful, as this would give them skills in the real-life context of research on gender in Africa. While this was a sound approach in the selection process, it did leave the team with some issues of power and masculinity to deal with in WRC’08 especially.

On the whole, we found that despite our marketing, there seemed to be an under-appreciation of the unique qualities of the programme across the continent. The number of applications doubled from year 1 to year 2. In year 3, we found applications even more difficult to promote, despite a very wide net cast throughout francophone Africa. Nevertheless, the quality of applicants was weaker than we anticipated. My own experience of other training programmes suggests that this is not a peculiar problem and of course to some extent it is the very rationale of the project. Nevertheless, assessment of the applicants revealed the enormous extent of under-preparedness of even post-PhD applicants for high-level research in social science.
C. PROJECT ACTIVITIES
1. Workshop/ Learning Process

A) Logistical issues

The 2008 workshop was held at the Sunnyside Park Hotel, close to the Wits Education and Medical Campuses. The motivation for this was to combine workshop and living space for maximum flexibility. Also, given that the workshop included some evening events, it reduced travel times in a city where transport and traffic are costly and time-consuming. However, after the first phase of the Institute, we realised that the hotel posed difficulties for participants. Although it was a very comfortable venue, it was not within walking distance of shops and restaurants. Participants found it difficult to shop for their personal needs, and ended up eating in the hotel restaurant at night which made the food monotonous. For the second phase of the 2008 Institute and all subsequent meetings, we moved to a small conference centre in Melville, the Wedgewood. Participants could now walk to stores and restaurants in their free time. Less easily resolved was the weather: holding the first part of the institute in winter was a logistical necessity but it was very very cold for African students!!!

Another complaint of participants at the first Institute meetings was that we did not provide a per diem for miscellaneous expenses. Our justification was that all expenses (transport and meals) were covered by the programme. For subsequent meetings, however, we provided a daily amount and participants had more say over their meals.

Addressing these logistical concerns made the Institute a much more pleasant experience and had a positive impact on the learning experience.

Nevertheless, WRC’09 experienced further unexpected logistical setbacks. The Malawian team leader simply failed to show up, with no prior warning. Similarly, the Zimbabwean team leader did not arrive in Johannesburg; leaving only one person in the team. One member of the Kenyan team arrived late, as she had been involved in a court case. Subsequently, a second Malawian team member had to leave the institute early as a result of a death in the family, rendering the team unfeasible. In the case of the Zimbabwean team, we partnered the remaining member of the Zimbabwean team with a South African organisation, the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre. By the second phase of the institute, the Zimbabwean researcher (Rose Hanzi) also dropped out without explanation despite the fact that the mentor, Prof Elsie Bonthuys, had spent a considerable amount of time resolving organisational blockages at the Zimbabwe Centre for Human Rights, where the researcher was based. The researcher from TLAC also dropped out as the demands were too strenuous and, we suspect, the research process too challenging. With Prof Bonthuys’ help, we had found a partner organisation in Harare for Rose Hanzi to work with (the Zimbabwe Women’s Legal Centre) and a further researcher to work in the team (Fadzai Chirwa). The remaining team, comprised of two researchers from the ZWLC, worked with Prof Bonthuys on what we considered to be an interesting and feasible proposal.

We found a similar problem with the francophone WRC ’10, when the leader of the Moroccan team was also prevented from attending the first phase because of a family crisis. The team leader was changed. However, they also worked well as a team, and both Sheila Meintjes, who led the francophone WRC and the mentor were helpful in providing extra assistance. The Algerian Team came with only two members, when one of the team proved unable to come. The CRASC, which is a very large National Centre for Research then provided an alternative third researcher, the second man on the WRC ’10 Training Institute.

The Rwandan team also proved somewhat of a challenge when the leader turned out to be a man, which had not been clear from his name. He proved to be a strong team builder.
Moreover, the younger team members were Ph.D students (registered in Sweden) and had to leave in the second week. The team from Djibouti faced a similar challenge, with two PhD candidates based in France who were torn between the demands of their research and developing the proposal in the WRC programme.

These difficulties, although discouraging at times, have made evident the very difficult conditions of work for researchers in many parts of the continent. In particular, we are much more aware that NGO-based researchers are unlikely to be given the kinds of support that are needed for the development of a research proposal as they are driven by short term funding crises and short term interests.

Finally, from a management point of view, the amount of time that was required for communication across different countries in Africa, the scale of difficulties that we faced in transferring seed funds across institutions, and the co-ordination of mentor visits and communications proved more challenging that we had thought. However, we were delighted that all the workshops and meetings took place on time and smoothly and that the complicated logistics of travel did not hamper the learning process.

B) Curriculum issues

The curriculum was developed collectively by the team responsible for teaching in each year. We sought to develop a balance between different teaching methodologies (seminar, small group work, independent reflection and self-evaluation) as well as incorporating guest presentations and discussions by people from the practitioner community, including trade unions and women’s organisations. The idea was to create a ‘learning hothouse,’ an intense and focused workshop that would prepare participants for more leisurely reflection on theoretical frameworks afterwards, during the proposal development phase.

The theoretical section of the curriculum sought to fill a gap in postgraduate programmes in Africa, which generally do not offer structured courses at PhD level, and only occasionally at Masters level. Readings and seminar discussions were designed to introduce participants to the history of ideas on women’s rights and citizenship, to understand the genealogy of concepts and to reflect on these critically and from the perspective of their own experiences of working in the area of gender rights in Africa. In WRC’08 we provided course packs with the core readings that could be retained by the participants, and used in the future by themselves and their institutions. In WRC ‘09 and ‘10 we provided CDs with scanned texts or PDF files of core readings.

The proposal development aspect of the curriculum focused on three strategies: epistemological debate, ability to understand and use methods appropriate to research projects, and core research skills such as textual reading, summarizing and comparing arguments. This component had its own course pack for the two English institutes and those participants based in universities used this in their own teaching. This was integrated into the CD for the French WRC ’10 as well.

In the June 2008 Institute, participants complained that the pace of the Institute was too demanding. None of the facilitators agreed; indeed, there was some concern on the teaching team that several participants were more interested in a break from their regular programme of work than seriously engaged with the Institute. At a subsequent curriculum workshop in April 2009, we attempted nevertheless to balance the learning experience with greater free time. The attached curricula reflect this. Based on mentoring experiences in WRC’08, more substantial changes made to the curriculum in WRC’09 were to significantly more attention to ‘soft’ issues related to research such as internal dynamics within research teams and the
ethics of collaborative research. This was incorporated into the programme for WRC ’10 as well.

The most successful aspect of the curriculum was the iterative peer-evaluation approach. Each research team evaluated the proposal of another team at the beginning of the institute, and then at intervals during the institute. Critical feedback was more easily received from peers and research teams generally showed a real willingness to engage with the suggestions and ideas of others. Appendices XX-XX show the various exercises used to elicit critical peer review and to build skills. During the course of the field break between the first and second training period, the French teams established a discussion platform in the form of a blog. The five francophone teams remained in close contact.

Far more difficult was the attempt to make distinctions between the concept of gender and its deployment in social science and policy research, and concepts and strategies of feminism. There was some hostility to the very use of the term and in a small minority of participants there was a strong resistance to thinking about sexuality. Prof Pumla Gqola, Advisory Committee member, facilitated discussions in both institutes about feminism in Africa and pushed participants beyond their initial resistance. In WRC’09, we invited Prof Sylvia Tamale as a guest lecturer, and her openness in talking about sexualities in Africa was both challenging and enabling. While the francophone teams included a large number of Muslim, there was in fact a greater openness towards embracing new ideas. This may reflect a stronger French philosophical and theoretical influence.

For WRC’09, we made all the readings available electronically well in advance of arrival in Johannesburg and asked that participants prepare for discussions. Nevertheless we found that over half participants did not read either ahead of the institute nor during the institute nor, surprisingly, during the development of the proposal. We envisaged that the course materials would be used for teaching purposes by participants as well, and indeed many did see the broader use of the materials. By far the greater number of participants found the course materials relating to proposal writing (the aspect of the programme run by Prof Susan van Zyl) to be more useful than the theoretical materials. This was gratifying as that section of the programme is indubitably innovative in the African context and the institute really has developed a replicable programme that is in itself a mini-short course on how to approach and write research proposals. In the case of the francophone WRC ’10, this role was played by Prof Sheila Meintjes and Dr Samadia Sadouni, although all the mentors also engaged with this aspect on their mentor visits.

The theoretical materials were barely used in most research proposals, despite continual reminders of their value by course facilitators and by mentors.

This remains a conundrum to us. When asked what the reasons were for not using the readings provided as resources for developing the proposals, the non-readers made the point that the readings were ‘too academic’. There seems to be a distinction in the minds of many researchers between reading done as part of or towards a degree and reading for research purposes. Most did not expect to encounter ‘academic-type’ seminars at the institute despite the information sent prior to arrival, and indeed to some extent many participants resented this aspect and resisted what they understood as an unfair injunction to participate in a theoretical manner. Some participants expressed the view that they did not expect or even desire more than a generic training in how to write a good proposal, understood by them as involving following a set of pre-assigned ‘headings.’ The francophone WRC ’10 participants did not evince the same resistance, again possibly because of a stronger theoretical and philosophical basis to academic and research work in general.

Given this kind of resistance, it is perhaps not surprising to report that participants really struggled to grasp basic concepts and there was little recognition of the genealogy of ideas or
the relationship between theoretical concepts and action-oriented research. The WRC team’s assessment of this is that the absence of high-level theory seminars in advanced degrees in Africa accounts for the lack of facility with theory. Equally troubling, understanding of contexts of policymaking and implementation tends to be very case-specific, with participants demonstrating deep understanding of the countries in which they live but virtually no comparative understanding even across regions within Africa. As a result, ideas for applied research tended to be framed in narrow terms, to show no appreciation of learning from other contexts and at times even hostility to generalisation.

Our view, however, is that both the theoretical foundations and comparative reading are invaluable for developing good applied research. Without these, researchers are only able to conduct case studies and are unlikely to make any impact on the production of new ideas in development. This is a long-term challenge. The team has engaged in several informal discussions about whether or not supporting directed PhD programmes on gender, citizenship and governance would be a way of overcoming the misconception about short courses and build research capacity in a more sustainable fashion. I reflect on this in the final section of the report in which I assess the overall lessons from the project.

3. Proposal development/ mentoring

For this aspect of the programme we depended heavily on the use of mentors, who straddled the roles of traditional supervisor and external readers, with extensive experience of how the research world worked.

The role of mentors was:

- To provide clear feedback on initial proposal and ongoing feedback on drafts
- To suggest further reading that would expand the theoretical understanding and framework for the proposal
- To advise on appropriate methodologies; introduce teams to new ways of doing research where possible
- To assess the budget proposed
- To visit research sites where possible
- To visit the host institution and offer a seminar
- To provide moral support and advise on managing difficulties within teams
- To write a final report on the mentorship process and an evaluation of the final proposal

The process and outcomes of mentorship differed. In WRC’08, one of the biggest problems was scheduling mentor visits at times that suited both research teams and mentors, and at the point most suitable for advancing the proposal development process. Mentors who visited the research team relatively soon after the institute made the greatest impact on the proposal. Perhaps the best example of this mentoring success was the relationship between Prof Amanda Gouws and the Ethiopian research team. In that case, Prof Gouws identified early on that there were power struggles within the team, was able to provide a set of guidelines for respectful relationships between researchers and assisted the team leader in ensuring that the difficult colleague was dropped from the team without undue impact on the project. By way of contrast, problems in the Cameroon team were picked up relatively late and the scheduling of the mentor’s trip towards the end of the proposal development period was problematic. There were unavoidable scheduling problems that necessitated a late visit, but when the airline canceled the flight to Douala we had no wiggle-room to reschedule a mentor’s visit. In the meantime the Cameroonian team leader revealed himself as authoritarian and hostile to the young women members of the team and proposal development was severely hampered. In WRC’09 we also arranged for research teams to meet with their mentors at the beginning of the institute and to spend some social time together in order to facilitate communications.
post-institute. As a result it was much easier to maintain links when the teams returned to their home bases and strong ongoing relationships developed.

The WRC '10 teams were all visited by their mentors, except for Rwanda, when Dr Benit-Gbaffou was unable to leave her baby. Professor Meintjes stepped in and visited Kigali and Butare on her behalf. She gave a lecture at the National University of Rwanda in Butare on Gender Mainstreaming. Unfortunately, the younger team members were in Europe, but were available on the internet. There were some difficulties experienced in the relationship between the Senegalese team and their mentor, partly because this team had not done enough work by the time the mentor visited. Moreover, the two researchers were not apprised of her visit to St Louis by the team leader and thus did not meet with her. This led to a contretemps.

Mentor visits provided the team with an opportunity to assess the institutional capacities of the research teams. In each case, mentors met with the colleagues and superiors, explained the project and sought to develop institutional buy-in for the project. In some cases, the extent of lack of capacity was clearly revealed. For example, the Madagascan team were clearly operating in an environment where internet connectivity was woefully inadequate, a factor that had not been fully apparent from earlier communications. It was only when we made the visit that we realised that the internet connection was located in only one office at the university. The library was virtually non-existent. Similar problems were encountered during visits to Zimbabwe, where higher education institutions are virtually collapsing and NGOs are constantly dealing with day-to-day crises. As a result, despite very diligent mentoring and visits to Harare, both Zimbabwean teams in 2008 and 2009 struggled to meet the demands of the institute.

4. Proposals

Perhaps unsurprisingly given the quality of applicants that we accepted into the programme, the proposals have been of variable quality. In 2008 we had two excellent proposals, from the Ethiopian team and the Ugandan team.

The proposal by the Ethiopian team, on the issue of the relationship between women’s increased representation and legislative and policy outcomes, was well received by the WRC facilitators and indeed by the IDRC as it did receive funding. The mentor’s report pointed out that excellent team leadership and buy-in by the host institution made the possibilities of successful outcome very high.

The Ugandan team, despite our advice, remained convinced that the question of gender and decentralisation was important. As a result they produced a proposal that was well-crafted and thought through but did not advance the existing literature on the debate, especially that within Uganda itself. Nevertheless, we felt that they gained a wide variety of skills from the programme and demonstrated that they were on the whole able to apply these.

As the WRC team, we thought that the Madagascan research team made significant progress under really exceptionally difficult circumstances including poorly resourced libraries and political unrest. Subsequent to the programme, there was a coup in the country and the communications system between the mentor and the team fell through.

The two weak proposals in the 2008 cohort, in our view, came from the Zimbabwean and the Cameroonian team. The Zimbabwean team struggled to focus on a feasible research question throughout the process and this was clearly a result of the very complicated political environment in the country during 2008. Our experience of working with this team highlighted the impact of political unrest on the freedom to frame research questions and to carry out research. We also saw first hand the impact of the economic decline on higher
education as researchers struggled to cope with the increasing lack of access to research and communications materials. If the Madagascan team had given up on the possibilities of good libraries, the Zimbabwean team by contrast were still trying to come to terms with the changing environment as they were far more accustomed to a functioning and excellent quality of universities.

In 2009, we had a much smaller pool of proposals given the drop-out of Malawi and the problems with the Zimbabwean team. Nevertheless, all three teams (Sierra Leone, Kenya and Mauritius) produced properly thought-out and well-written research proposals that we were sure are fundable. The mentors’ reports suggest that the Sierra Leone team has the highest capability of follow-through. Their research aimed to address the important question of access points for legislative impact of elected women representatives. Their case studies included legislation that was successfully adopted as well as legislation that the Sierra Leone parliament did not pass. The Kenyan team took on the issues of sexual violence that accompanied democratization in that country, and even their seed money produced the evidence of electoral violence directed through women. Unfortunately that team did not hold together for long enough to complete the research, as a result of other organisational demands. However, Marilyn Ossome, the team leader, retained her interest in the topic and subsequently saved money and moved to Johannesburg to work on her PhD on sexual violence under the supervision of Professor Hassim.

The Mauritian team was made up of researchers with excellent ideas but insufficient focus. Their proposal to examine labour migration and family form was very competent, albeit produced under pressure of heavy workloads. One team member who already had a PhD was keen to leave the island to pursue an academic career, and that had an impact on follow-through. It was evident that there may be problems with commitment to a large project that runs over a relatively long period as the team seemed to be stumped by the challenge of managing research activities with regular teaching and administrative commitments. Subsequently one of the team has begun the process of registering for a PhD at Wits, under the supervision of Prof Jacklyn Cock (a member of the WRC teaching team).

The francophone WRC ’10, saw two teams from North Africa, Morocco and Algeria, one from the tiny Somalian state of Djibouti, one from Senegal, and the fifth from Rwanda. Although more theoretically strong, it is clear that research capability among the francophone researchers was also uneven, though perhaps less so than among the Anglophone researchers. Like the Anglophone teams, there was not always a clear grasp of the subtleties of the concepts used in the debates on sex and gender and the debates on representation. Most of the members were able to at least read English, but many of the texts that we provided were translated, and engaging with the Anglo-Saxon debates was exciting and revealing for all of them.

The proposal presented by the Moroccan team was both clear and strong, an indication that the leadership problems had not hampered their work. They came up with an interesting proposal which in the Moroccan context has great significance. The topic is on ‘Gender and Local Governance: Moroccan Women Councillors elected in 2009’ and engages with the context of substantive social change and political reform in a country in transition to democracy. From 0.2 percent representation of women in 2003 to 12% in 2009, the study would make a significant contribution to an understanding of what is driving change, and the impact that social change in the North African region is having on women’s political participation. We think that it is in fact a proposal that is worthy of IDRC support.

The Algerian team struggled somewhat to find the central research question, and to develop a coherent proposal. The final product however showed enormous progress and the very real impact of the WRC Training. The multidisciplinary team has produced a good proposal for a study of the challenges in the state and in society to the participation of women in politics in
Algeria. This is a particularly important topic given Algeria’s recent violent civil war (1991 - 2001), the exclusion of women from politics during the period and the transformations in the region since the Arab Spring.

The other three proposals were disappointingly weak, given the strengths of some of the members of these teams and most likely reflects the fact that the leaders were left to finalise the proposals without much support from the other two members of each team. The Djibouti team members apart from the leader were completing their Ph.Ds, as was the case with the Rwandan team members. The Senegalese team did not effectively engage with the literature in the three countries they wished to compare. None of the proposals from these three teams provided a strong enough justification in terms of locating the research in the broader literature nor in the specifics of the research field to warrant grant funding to do the research.

Overall, the disjunction between the ability to grasp and articulate experiences verbally and the ability to write was marked. Writing skills were poorly developed among all participants, and we had not anticipated the need to address writing as a specific element in the programme.

5. Speaker Series

As a means of communication and publicity, we proposed an annual public lecture with a prominent women speaker on the theme of women and leadership. Our aim was to invite women from South Africa and the region to give a public lecture to a broad audience. In the first year, scheduling difficulties for prominent speakers hampered our efforts to host a public lecture. In its place, we invited several guests from civil society to present informal workshops with institute participants. These included feminist activist Bunie Matlakanye Sexwale, leading activist in the gender-based violence sector, Lisa Vetten a senior researcher from the NGO, Tshwarang Legal Advocacy Centre Against Violence against women, and Peace Kiguwa who spoke movingly about the challenges of writing as a black woman.

In 2009, we invited Prof Sylvia Tamale, international expert in the area of women’s rights, sexuality and the law in Africa. She spent three full days at the Institute participating in discussions and meeting with each of the research teams. She presented an evening interactive discussion on the ethical and theoretical questions associated with research on gender and sexualities. She also presented a public seminar at the University of the Witwatersrand on the anti-homosexuality bill in Uganda. We also invited Pat Horn, founder of the Self-Employed Women’s Union in South Africa and founding member of StreetNet, a global network of informal hawkers, to present an afternoon workshop on women and informal labour in the global economy.

In 2010, Professor Fatou Sow and Dr Codou Bop both from Senegal and members of the Network on Women Living under Muslim Law, participated in the training and spent several days at the first workshop, while Professor Fatou Sow gave a public lecture. Dr Bop also mentored the Algerian team.

6. Electronic Networking

We had hoped to partner with the advocacy website, Women’snet, to provide facilities for networking and a platform for ongoing exchange of resources. However, Women’snet went through a series of organisational crises including a fire at their offices, and by the time that they were in a position to create a dedicated website it no longer seemed feasible for the project.
This is a project activity that did not materialise although in terms of ongoing networking we have worked to keep participants in touch with each other. They have reported various interchanges between teams during the proposal writing process and have shared notes and information among themselves. Most are members of GWSAfrica, a network hosted by the African Gender Institute at UCT and which we have used as a means of general communication as well.
D. Overall Assessment: Gains, opportunities and weaknesses

While we have emphasized many of the challenges posed by the three-year programme, an overall assessment must also recognize the important strength of the programme, which was an African-based programme for African researchers. It provided a very important opportunity for scholars from all over the continent, from diverse tertiary regimes, to meet, to share ideas, to learn together, and to establish strong ongoing relationships that will lead to greater co-operation and understanding of our mutual interests in growing our research capabilities.

We have already engaged in further training of leadership capacity through other projects. But the networking that the WRC has enabled and has seen growing co-operation between institutions (such as CRASC in Oran and Wits), with standing invitations for further exchange in all the countries from which our teams originated. There is clearly a great need to continue the process that the WRC began.

In particular we would like to note with appreciation the close involvement of the programme manager at the IDRC, Eileen Alma. Her interest in the project straddled the intellectual and managerial aspects, and she was extremely helpful in problem solving with regard to the difficulties of selection and team logistics.

When the concept for this project was first developed, we had few models to draw on. There are innumerable workshops and short courses that offer compressed training on themes or in special fields. Relevant comparisons for the WRC Institute might be:

- CODESRIA’s research workshops, held annually for over a decade with gender workshops lead by leading African feminists
- Democracy and Diversity Institute, hosted by the New School for Social Research, which has run for nearly two decades in Poland and South Africa, which Professor Hassim has been involved in.
- The American Political Science Association’s workshops on special themes. Under this rubric, specific Africa Workshops have been introduced (the Gender and Citizenship workshop was run in Dar Es Salaam in 2010 by Aili Mari Tripp, Gretchen Bauer and Shireen Hassim).
- The Johannesburg Workshop on Theory and Criticism at the University of the Witwatersrand

These institutes are all run as two to three week intensive courses, with none focused directly on the link between theory, research design and proposal writing. Apart from the APSA workshops, none deal with the relationships between research and policy. None have the mentorship component of the WRC.

This is a difficult project to measure in the short term. On the quantitative side, we can claim to have trained nearly 40 researchers over the three years, and to have mentored the development of 17 large research proposals. This is a significant achievement in itself, given the serious shortage of research skills as laid out in section A.

We have on several occasions wondered whether the aims might not have been better served by expanding the scholarships for Masters and PhD study. Formal study programmes develop theoretical and research writing skills over a longer period, with a clearly measurable output. On reflection, though, such an approach would not have served our aims for several reasons.

a. Masters and Doctoral programmes are still poorly developed on the continent. In many countries universities do not offer courses at PhD level, but rely on students to
work on their projects relatively independently. Where baseline skills are poorly developed, as with most of the participants in our institute, students flounder.

b. Postgraduate study is expensive and time-consuming, and we would not be able to sponsor as many people as in the institute.

c. PhD programmes focus on the academic aspects of the dissertation, with little or not attention to policy processes. We continue to see value-added in institutes that are specifically honing skills for theoretically sound research that has a policy impact. In particular, we see a need for developing the ability of researchers to frame applied research questions based on strong comparative and theoretical foundations.

d. With regard to gender analysis, there is still a relatively under-developed supervisory capacity on the continent.

Weaknesses

1. We had anticipated that good proposals would find their way into the IDRC selection processes and secure funding. However, several changes on the IDRC side, including re-structuring of the ways in which gender research was addressed within the agency, resulted in the follow up to each institute being slower and less successful than we had hoped. Recession and funding cuts have also played their part in restricting funding available. Several proposals have not yet had a response from the IDRC.

2. With regard to this concern, we did not plan for the time that would be necessary after each institute for follow up with the research teams. This was in part because we immediately went into the cycle for the next institute, and also because mentors could not feasibly be expected to remain onboard beyond the duration of the institute. There have been informal connections with mentors and with the project management team, but there is almost no structured ongoing sharing.

3. We under-budgeted for an assistant. Communications between participants and the programme were hugely time-consuming, and there was too little development of networks and information sharing between the participants. The French institute participants developed a blog, but a more structured discussion requires dedicated oversight. Participants relied on Wits to generate content with regard to ongoing research interests and we were unable to provide this.

4. We became uncomfortably aware of the need to install a financial planning model that would help us track expenditures on a continuous basis, and to judge as a result how we made spread savings in one area to develop another within the project. We believe at least some of the weaknesses addressed might have been overcome if we had been able to pick up under-spending earlier and make cogent proposals to the IDRC for how to adjust the budget.