

FINAL TECHNICAL REPORT / RAPPORT TECHNIQUE FINAL

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Final Technical Report
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Executive Summary

This project has demonstrated that **it is possible to deploy learning approaches that strengthen the motivation and capacities of researchers and project officers to work in more gender-responsive ways and ensure stronger gender-related research outcomes.**

In 2016 when this project was being developed there was considerable concern within IDRC regarding a lack of gender-responsive research. The Networked Economies (NE) program was at the forefront of transforming its programming around gender equality issues in the field of digital innovation and improving gender-related research outcomes.

Accordingly, this action research project was intended to answer two questions:

- *How do researchers and organizations improve capacity and interest in designing and implementing gender-sensitive research?*
- *What is required to facilitate this improvement?*

Over 3.5 years, the project has worked with more than 15 partner organizations, held workshops, led mentoring sessions, commented on papers, convened meetings, written papers, led strategy sessions and was part of the leadership team in the creation of a new feminist Artificial Intelligence (AI) research network.

During this time, the Gender at Work team (G@W) have been collecting ethnographic and survey data and have analyzed the findings to help us answer the research questions. However, in consultation with NE, the complete analysis was postponed until the second half of 2020 as a result of the decision to focus the team's resources on the Feminist AI Research Network. However, G@W have assembled preliminary conclusions, and this report describes these findings. We anticipate publishing the full analysis in late 2020 as part of Phase 2 of this project.

Although challenged by varying degrees of readiness for gender transformative change and the full and busy schedules of both partners and NE staff, the **project has seen changes in research projects toward more gender-responsiveness, changes in partner organizations towards deeper organizational gender capacity, changes in the understanding and capacity of both NE staff and partners and changes in the NE program itself.**

These changes cannot be attributed directly to the actions of Gender at Work, but we contributed to and were part of these outcomes. We believe that change has happened as a result of a multitude of factors which will be explored further in NE Phase 2 research. One particularly noteworthy change has been the framing of gender and research across NE staff and partners, from gender-sensitive in the original plan, to gender-responsive, to feminist. The drivers of this shift, conceptualizations, and the implications for NE research will be explored in depth in the consolidation of learning and results. However, our preliminary analysis indicates that **an intersectional feminist approach is a more fruitful path for research that advances development and human rights.** This approach is receiving increasing attention in the literature (see for example, D'Ignazio and Klein, 2020) and in the discussions we have been having with

partners. We believe that the focus on power relations, intersectionality, data equity and a focus on change make this approach a more robust tool for thinking about digital research from a transformational perspective.

The research problem

As stated in our proposal (December, 2016), the research problem was to understand if it was possible to improve the capacity of the NE program and its research partners to develop and scale up gender responsive programming and research and to understand the change process associated with this increase in capacity.

According to the 2016 World Development Report, [Digital Dividends](#), which we highlighted in G@W's initial proposal, digital technologies offer important benefits to development. At the same time, the World Bank demonstrated how these benefits have been unequally distributed (World Bank, 2016). Gender and class are two main dimensions of this divide (Elder *et al*, 2013). Accordingly, agencies such as IDRC have been encouraging researchers to do gender sensitive research, ensuring that women can fully participate in emerging networked economies.

While there are good examples of ICT research focused on gender equality, there was a consensus that mainstreaming gender into ICT research projects had been less effective than expected ([Buskens and Webb 2009](#); Drissi and Rashid 2015). Networked Economies (NE) was aiming to improve the capacity of the program and its partners to develop and scale up gender responsive programming and research. The NE program had invested in a range of gender-related activities, with some successes, but with mixed impact: a 2016 External Review of the NE program at IDRC found that less than ten percent of sampled projects were gender responsive.

Surveys with *Technology and Innovation* program staff also showed that not only was there uncertainty over what 'gender mainstreaming' actually meant but program staff did not always know how to hold partners accountable for gender-related outcomes. There were open questions about how to build capacity and to integrate gender outcomes throughout the program, and enduring challenges overall in development with gender mainstreaming, integration and responsiveness.

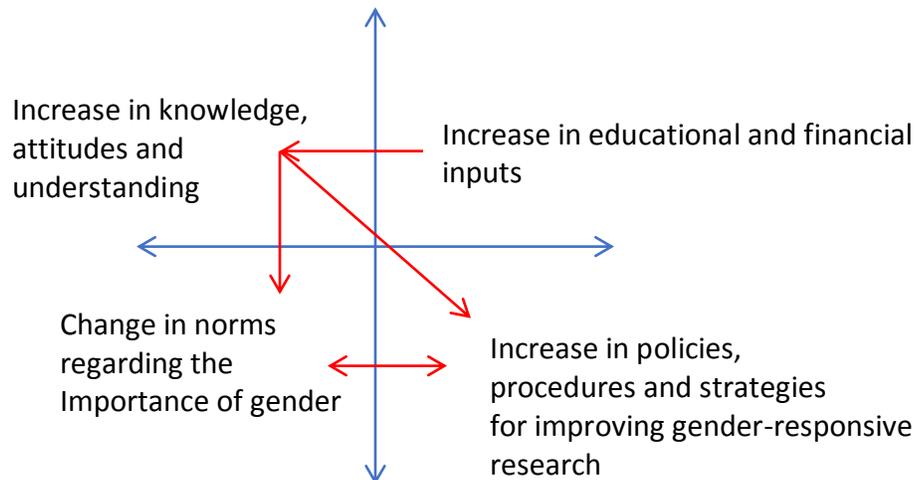
To address these challenges, the G@W action research project has been pursuing the following questions: *How do researchers and organizations improve capacity and interest in designing and implementing gender-sensitive research? And what is required to facilitate this improvement?*

The research looked at four areas:

- Individual capabilities: What are the processes of learning and how are they facilitated to generate positive gender equality outcomes?

- Policies and procedures: What are the rules, policies and protocols associated with improved gender outcomes?
- Resources: What kinds of resources and costs are associated with positive change toward gender equality?
- Social norms: What configuration of individual learning, policies and resources can change norms related to gender and ICT research.

We hypothesize that change in capacity is dependent on a pattern of change in all four quadrants of the Gender at Work Framework.¹ The diagram below shows the hypothesized impact of various changes. An increase in educational inputs (peer learning and mentoring), leads to increased knowledge, and skill, which can lead to improved policies and protocols and a change in organizational norms regarding gender-responsive research. All or some of these changes will lead to improved capacity (as defined by an increase in gender-responsive research).



¹ For more information about the framework, see genderatwork.org

Progress Toward Milestones

From March 2017 to June 2020, we worked with over 15 research partner organizations and all NE Project Officers. We met individually with POs and research partners, convened and facilitated meetings and workshops, collected research data on the process and were part of the leadership team that created the Feminist AI Research Network.

The major milestones of the project are as follows:

Before the beginning: Attendance at the **partners' meeting in Zanzibar** in September 2016 to present the program to partners. This gave G@W an opportunity to meet the partners face to face, to discuss the program with them and to begin to formulate an approach likely to be successful.

January to March 2017: **Start up and inception meetings with NE team.** These meetings built an understanding of the work of NE, its partners and the cultural norms that underlay the enterprise. We were also able to test our approach with NE staff. The meetings showed strong commitment on the part of NE and resulted in a set of mentoring relationships between G@W and NE staff.

March 2017: Began mentoring with NE project officers (POs) and research partners. (Details in the Activities section below)

December 31, 2017: Submission of the Second Interim Technical report in which we reviewed the year, discussed the results of a **survey of POs and set forth a revised plan** for the next year. The survey showed both increased capacity and motivation of the POs to integrate gender equality considerations into projects and a high level of satisfaction with the process to date.

April 2018: **Peer Learning meeting with the NE staff** discussed program strategy from a gender standpoint and also affirmed the approach to mentoring.

September 2018: **Partners Meeting on Gender Equality.** G@W **designed and facilitated the NE Partners Meeting.** There were energetic discussions and a number of people found these quite helpful. Feedback was split however; many enjoyed the opportunity for discussion, other participants wanted more structure, frameworks and other inputs by Gender at Work.

One benefit was that G@W was able to meet face to face with partners which provided us with a better understanding of the partners' needs and their preferences regarding how to engage with us. We were then better prepared to provide the requested substantive inputs to individual partners through mentoring, discussions and workshops.

September 2018: **Launch of the Cyber Policy Centres Action Learning Program.** We held a two-day meeting with RIA, CIS, LirneAsia, and CIDE to launch the program, build a learning community and develop a learning path with each of the organizations. The meeting was

reasonably well-received and served as a platform for continued work with the Cyber Policy Centres.

December 2018: Two-day **research meeting of Gender at Work facilitators and our project officer** in Montreal to consider findings to date.

July 2019: Began work on **Feminist Artificial Intelligence** scoping the field and developing a blog post.

December 2019: **Research meeting** with G@W team to consider preliminary analysis.

January 2020 to June 2020: Work with the A+ Alliance to **develop a feminist AI research network**, production of 2 papers, involved in the preparation of two others.

Activities

The activities in this project can be seen as three “bundles”:

1. **Mentoring research partners:** This work ranged from “light touch” (brief discussions of approach, or reading and commenting on papers) to on-going relationship that provided a space for reflection (including workshops) to supporting intensive change processes over time. Organizations that G@W worked with include Citizen Lab, OD4D, Feminist Open Government (FOGO), SEED Alliance, Digital Open Textbooks for Development, Caribbean Open Institute, Birzeit University, Ceibal Foundation and TPD@Scale.
2. **Mentoring NE POs:** This work focused on thinking with POs about the place of gender equality in research and looking at particular projects in order to think more deeply about the gender aspects of the research design and intended outcomes. The projects we were involved with in this way included: After Access, Internet 5, Haiti project with the Caribbean Open Institute to train women for the gig economy, STEM education in Colombia, On-Line Businesses in Upper Egypt (a partnership of the Government of Egypt, the National network of Skill Training Institutions and others), Refugee Resilience in Jordan and Lebanon and the Teachers’ Training Research Network with Birzeit University.
3. **Leading and participating in partners’ meetings:** This includes participating in the partners meeting in Zanzibar to introduce the program, participating in the inception meeting of the Feminist Internet Research Network and the Cyber Policy Centres meeting in Sri Lanka, leading the partners’ meeting on gender and the Cyber Policy Centres’ workshops in Ottawa and Tunis, leading workshops with Citizen Lab partners and OD4D partners, and co-leading the weekly meetings of the Feminist AI Network.

Research Results and Development Outcomes

This project has demonstrated that, given sufficient time, resources and contextual relevance, it is possible to deploy learning approaches that strengthen the motivation and capacities of researchers and project officers to work in more gender-responsive ways and ensure stronger gender-related research outcomes.

The analysis has found significant changes in five main categories: the research itself, organizational functioning of research organizations, individual learning of researchers, the capacity of NE Project Officers, and the functioning of the NE program.

An important caveat is that these cannot be attributed entirely to G@W. We contributed to and were part of these outcomes, but change has happened as a result of a multitude of factors which will be explored further in NE Phase 2 research. Central in this analysis will be the shift evident over the past three years in the framing of gender and research across IDRC NE staff and partners, from gender-sensitive in the original plan, to gender-responsive, to feminist. The drivers of this shift, conceptualizations, and the implications for NE research will be explored in some depth in the consolidation of learning and results.

The Partners:

Work with partners has resulted in a range of positive changes. There have been organizational and cultural changes, new research initiatives, strengthened proposals, and personal learning (in some cases profound) regarding gender feminist approaches to research.

Over the three years of the project we have worked with more than fifteen partner organizations, some more intensively than others. We have led workshops, commented on papers, held mentoring sessions, attended meetings, assisted with framing and scoping projects, written papers and commented on program strategy. Positive outcomes with partners have included changes at three levels: the research itself, organizational functioning of research organizations and individual learning of partners.

The research itself--for example, the addition of a gender stream at the Summer Institute and new LGBTQ research at Citizen Lab, Privacy International's research on gender, surveillance and technology, research on feminist approaches to Open Government, and bringing a gender perspective to DOT4D.

Partners' comments from the 2018 partners' survey include:

"Conducted a scoping study to find gaps in gender-related research relevant to my field."

"As part of our change project, we encourage each project team at CIS to explore research questions through a gender lens. Some of our recent projects on reproductive

health and surveillance, and feminist infrastructures have been specifically framed with a gender lens as well as some of the outputs we are working on including a feminist critique of cyber security."

"We have selected case study participants with gender equality in mind. We have focused interview questions on gender inequalities in the classroom (Higher education)."

Organizational functioning of research organizations— bringing a feminist consciousness to organizational culture and functioning such as the work with Centre for Internet and Society (CIS) and the Centre for Intellectual Property and Information Technology Law (CIPIT); building capacity for feminist research methods with Derechos Digitales, and LirneAsia.

Examples from the survey

- "Advancing gender equality with an intersectional lens has been an important learning and a continued challenge for us. This is significant as it is imperative to move beyond questions of representational parity and access, to understand better how work on gender is informed by other forms of identity, questions of power and privilege, and how these need to be better integrated into our research questions"
- "We are on the way [to] implement the research project we worked to identify in the last GAL meeting related to how to improve self-care from an institutional perspective. We have our first work meeting later this week."
- "In my context in South Africa our focus in our research is on redressing inequality. This is often firmly focused on Race and it has resulted in less focus on gender and so gender representation in Higher education has become less of a focus. This was an important lesson for me. The approach we have taken is to have gender and race as key features in future work."

Individual learning of researchers—often, if research organizations are limited in the changes they can make, individual researchers reported significant learning about gender in research, about feminist methods and about organizational supports and blocks to feminist research.

Examples from the survey:

- "I could make reflections and share with my male colleagues about relationships of power and health [in] the research team, it's a petite advance, but significant"
- "I am much more aware of the need to work in gender issues with a systemic approach, not only in the research, but also in the institutional frameworks and procedures."

- I have a better understanding of what it means to think in terms of institutional process and culture with a more feminist approach beyond gender specific considerations.

In a blog post, one partner described her learning experience of coming to understand feminist research approaches in part,

"But does the community I do research on share my enquiries or questions? In designing projects – I begin to unpack how, with my curiosity, this project will also have value for the research participants – making it a process of co-creation of knowledge. It means that I intentionally shift from making myself the complete knower – coming to extract the juice of your knowledge and applying my own meaning to it. It also means that while my resources may limit me to transform injustices, the knowledge from the research returns to the community as well as policymakers.²"

At the same time, some partners were clear they were in the middle of a learning process:

"I feel like I have a good grasp of the issues but struggle to integrate it properly when I am not working on a 'gender-focused' project."

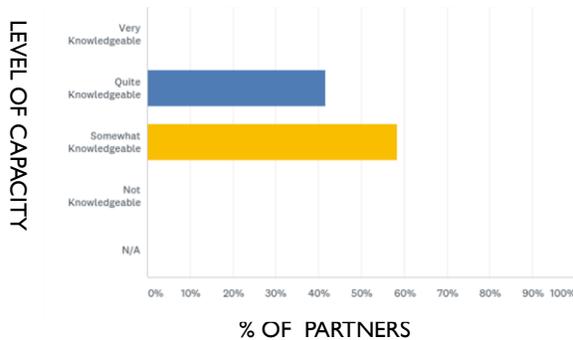
"I am aware of the need to integrate gender issues, but lack a more systemic approach to do it. I am not trained in methodologies or strategies with that purpose."

The slide below (from the 2019 survey) shows that partners rated themselves as having more to learn but credited NE staff and G@W in helping them get started.

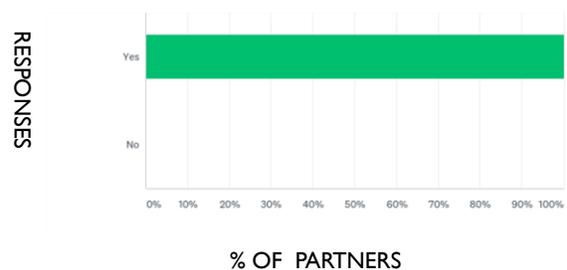
² Chair, Chenai, 2019. Letter to My Younger Self: A Budding Feminist Researcher. GenderIT.org. <https://www.genderit.org/feminist-talk/letter-my-younger-self-budding-feminist-researcher>

IDRC PARTNER SURVEY RESPONSES

Partner Q1: How would you rate your current capacity to integrate a gender perspective into your research projects



Partner Q2: Has your capacity to integrate a gender perspective into your research improved since you first received support from Gender@Work?



Networked Economies Program

Over three years the program has moved from gender intentions to gender action. It has developed strong programs with gender equality or feminist thinking at their core.

Early in the project, we noticed the discourse had changed within the team. There was much more talk about gender and digital innovation and there was thoughtful work on Internet 5 and the Feminist Research Network. We also noticed the depth of the discussion evolved over time. From data collected in peer learning meetings it was clear that gender was no longer an afterthought but central to many discussions including the overall program strategy of the team. A second indication was the evolution from a “gender” framework to a “feminist” one. This was shown in the choice of “Feminist” Internet Research Network, “FOGO” (Feminist Open Government) and “Feminist Artificial Intelligence Research Network.”³

Finally, and most concretely, a study of NE Program Approval Documents in 2019 showed a significant increase in PADs with a gender component over the period up to 2016.⁴

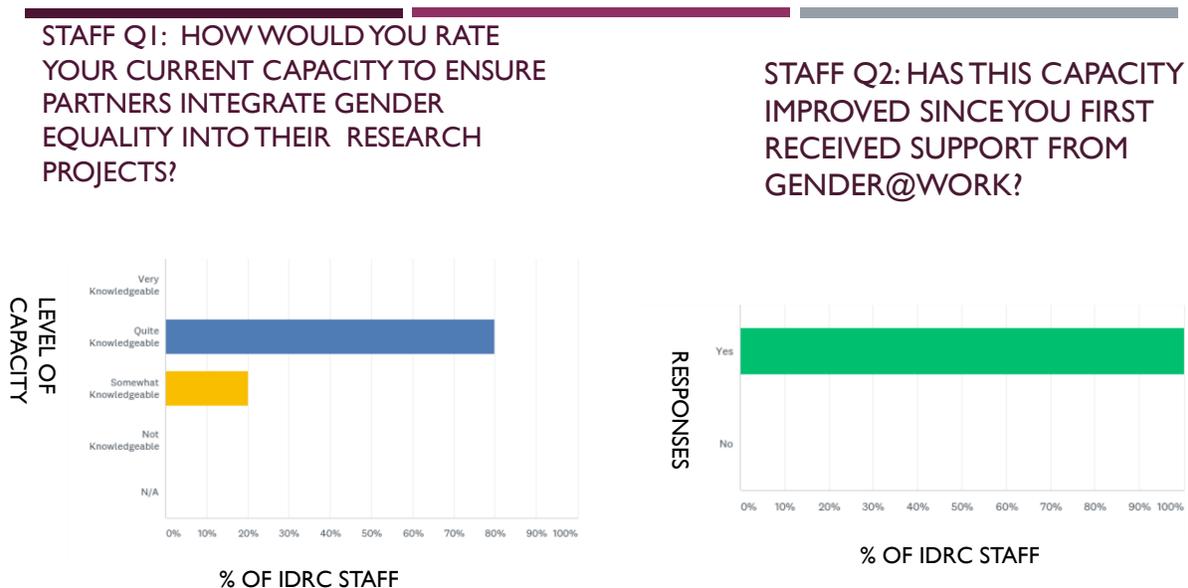
³ A “gender responsive” framework is rooted in the differences between women and men and often focusses heavily on differential benefits. This and other dimensions of gender analysis are important but a feminist framework, particularly an intersectional one widens the focus to a more explicit attention on power relations between various groups (women, men, marginalized groups, and LGBTQ people). The focus on power relations extends to the relations between participants in the research and the researcher and can allow for a deeper understanding of findings.

⁴ Unpublished internal study.

Networked Economies Staff

NE Project Officers showed clearly defining gains in capacity over the life of the program becoming more knowledgeable and more capable of working with partners (using a questioning approach) to integrate gender considerations into research.

Although building staff capacity was not a primary goal of the program, the early months saw steady growth in capacity, measured over three surveys. The chart below shows that by the end of the project most POs felt “very knowledgeable”. It was clear that some POs were able to benefit more from the project than others based on interest, relationship with their mentor and opportunities to build projects with strong gender or feminist aspects.



POs deepened their understanding of gender and learned about working with partners to integrate gender into projects using a collaborative, questioning approach as opposed to trying to demand particular gender components.

- I have a better understanding of what it means to think in terms of institutional process and culture with a more feminist approach beyond gender specific considerations.
- I learned how important it is to include not only the women's equality perspective into my research, but having into consideration other aspects regarding the broader gender spectrum, including, for instance, non-binary people who are often excluded in the development of public policies.

- There needs to be intentionality towards gender responsive research from the beginning, otherwise considerations and evaluation during implementation may be too late or not aligned with project objectives.
- I have learnt that you need to work "along" partners so that they genuinely integrate a gender perspective so that it become sustainable in time. Getting them to understand the importance of the issue and the relevance of asking the right questions to trigger curiosity and genuine interest in their side. It is significant because that was not the way I use to operate in the past and this is a much more effective ways of approaching the problem.

This description of outcomes will be augmented in our upcoming research reports. Because we shifted our focus in the last six months of the program to supporting the development of the Feminist AI Research Network, we re-scheduled time to complete the data analysis. We anticipate that various publications and research products will be completed by January 2021.

Methodology

In this action research project there are two sets of methodologies that are important. The first is the set of methods to shape **learning spaces**. The second is the set of **research methods**, we used to measure change and reflect upon the learning.

The learning methods employed both support for individual learning (which we refer to as 'mentoring') as well as workshops and peer learning spaces. In all cases the project used collaborative methods that were characterized by:

- A spirit of mutual inquiry and puzzle-solving that respected the knowledge of all people in the relationship.
- Dialogic, open-ended and emerging conversations that attempt to craft effective responses for particular contexts.
- Occasional guidance or provision of resources when appropriate
- A belief that ultimately, POs and partners needed to find ways to make gender equality part of their projects in ways that make sense to them.

The research methodology was largely qualitative but augmented with occasional surveys. The qualitative data comprised:

- Post-meeting notes
- Document archive of approximately 400 notes, memos, etc. over the 3 years. These notes have been organized into time periods and short summaries have been written.
- Short blog post reflections by each of the team
- Short case studies of some of the projects we worked with.

The quantitative data was made up of surveys: baseline of PO competence, PO satisfaction with the inception meeting and the process, follow up of PO competence, PO satisfaction after year 1, partner and PO survey after year 3.

The data related to post-mentoring reflections have been analyzed using NVivo. The remainder (the 400 or so documents, surveys, blogs etc.) are being analyzed using a qualitative analysis approach based on methods suggested by Miles, Huberman and Saldana, (2014). Beginning with the original research questions and a conceptual framework, the documents are studied, and coded. The codes lead to themes and a revised conceptual framework and hypothesized relationships between variables and outcomes. These hypotheses are tested in discussion with the G@W team and NE staff.

Project Outputs

To date the project has produced two papers, both related to the Feminist AI Network. The papers are:

Carol Miller and David Kelleher, Feminist Research and AI: An initial provocation around feminist methodologies and priorities, Briefing Paper to be published in the upcoming publication on Feminist AI

David Kelleher and Laura Haylock, Norms, Culture and Tech: Briefing Paper to be published in upcoming publication on Feminist AI.

Remaining outputs will be produced as part of Phase 2 of this project. They include:

1. A publication that describes findings related to supporting learning to increase in gender-related and feminist research outcomes as well as organizational changes to support more research work.
2. A journal article on mentoring
3. A blog series on facilitation of learning
4. A podcast on the intersection of digital innovation, gender equality and learning.

Problems and Challenges

This section outlines our tentative understanding of three key inter-related variables and how they affected the success of the project. These three variables have been tentatively labelled: Readiness, Busy-ness/complexity and Influencing partners.

Readiness

There has been considerable research on readiness for change (Kelleher et al., 1996). DECI has also thought about readiness with NE partners specifically.⁵

Our thinking about readiness is somewhat different. As in previous work, the professional environment, and the expectations of donors are important. But, while most partners would be ready to learn conceptually about gender and research, a smaller number are ready to re-think their understandings of epistemology, methods, and the power relations between researcher and subject. Some are not ready to commit to a sustained learning process and few are ready to commit to the personal exploration that would go along with a different approach to research. In other words, the question becomes, ready for what? There is a wide range (and depth) of possible learning when one opens the box of “gender and research”. In some cases, project leaders were open to learning a little and ended up going much deeper than anticipated.

NE research partners are experienced researchers, many of whom had already come to grips with “gender” in their research. But, most are curious, and many have undertaken considerable learning through this project. However, for many this learning is not a burning, personal question, it is a technical question.

Partners’ response to a technical question is to look for expert advice (hopefully backed by empirical research). Our belief is that learning about gender and research requires a personal search for solutions and ways of thinking that fit a partner’s particular context. We were challenged to straddle this personal-technical divide. That is, to respond to a request for technical assistance and also try and move the learning deeper to a level more likely to result in more transformative change in individuals’ and organizations understanding of research that can advance an equality agenda.

Busy-ness/complexity

In an early meeting with NE staff, we diagrammed the POs role. We were surprised to see that POs were required to maintain relationships with 15 different sets of stakeholders. They are expected to be intellectual leaders, project overseers, talent scouts, and often counsellors to

⁵ Ramirez, R., Brodhead D., 2017. Evaluation and Communication Decision-Making: A Practitioner’s Guide. Metcalfe, Ontario: DECI -2 Project.

project leaders. We came to understand just how busy their lives were and also how the role can be disjointed as projects are cancelled or don't start on time or are altered in some other way. Although different POs faced different pressures, we came to understand that POs may not be available when we had hoped or that we might not get a response to an e-mail.

Partners were also very busy, many had punishing travel schedules, were constantly writing proposals for the next grant or were turning out reports for the last one.

All of this complexity militated against a structured, on-going learning process and challenged us to invent ways of intervening often on the spot and providing help in very intermittent ways. For example, one of our team was working with a PO on understanding the gender dynamics of a particular project and was developing some momentum and shared understanding when the project was postponed and the POs attention was immediately taken up with other issues. The conversation re-started some months later on a different project.

Influencing partners

We learned that there is a very interesting relationship between Project Officers and partners. If POs are fortunate they get to work with world-class researchers who will bring important findings to IDRC. Wisely, we believe, POs work with their partners with deep respect and in a very collaborative way. POs are quite careful about challenging how partners undertake projects.

At the same time, POs have stated that they do not feel capable of helping partners integrate gender into their research. We also noticed that partners felt "limited capital" regarding gender. By this we mean that they had less knowledge than they needed and little time to get it.

Considerable effort was devoted to helping POs feel more capable and to helping partners see the worth of a deeper focus on gender and inclusion issues but, lack of pressure, partners existing understandings of gender and research and partners' lack of time resulted in reduced motivation for learning for many partners. We were challenged to find ways to make ourselves useful in systems that saw gender as one of many priorities.

A more definitive understanding of challenges in implementing the project awaits the analysis that will be done over the next few months.

Overall Assessment and Recommendations

We believe that there are three main ideas to take away from this action research project. They will be further sharpened and developed in the research component of Phase 2 of this project.

1. Learning is possible--given sufficient time, resources and contextual relevance, it is possible to deploy learning approaches that strengthen the motivation and capacities of researchers and project officers to work in more gender-responsive ways and ensure stronger gender-related research outcomes. Project leaders see that increased capacities positively impact their research and that gender-based analysis enhances research quality. Project leaders' self-perceptions of capacities increased over time, and with more consistent engagement. Relationships characterized by consistent engagement, conversation, help, encouragement and support, active listening, critical reflection made a difference to learning.
2. That although the project was originally focused on "gender" relations and their place in research, what has emerged from this project is that an intersectional feminist approach is a more fruitful path for research that advances development and human rights. Thinking about gender leads us to think about men and women and their differences, particularly the difference in benefits. This is important but, an intersectional feminist approach goes well beyond. An intersectional feminist approach would be characterized by: a requirement to include a concern for gender, race and the voices of marginalized groups; methods that are sensitive to previously unheard voices and the power relations that underlie that silence; engagement with the "subjects" of the research to ensure that the complexity of their reality shapes the findings; and finally, that the research is focused on change and not just description.
3. Not all researchers will want to work in this way but we believe feminist approaches should be seen as fundamental to transformational research and should be recognized by IDRC as a standard essential to the pursuit of transformational research. Learning should aspire to moving toward this standard. We will seek to build this case with corroborating evidence in Phase 2.

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