KIT Royal Tropical Institute
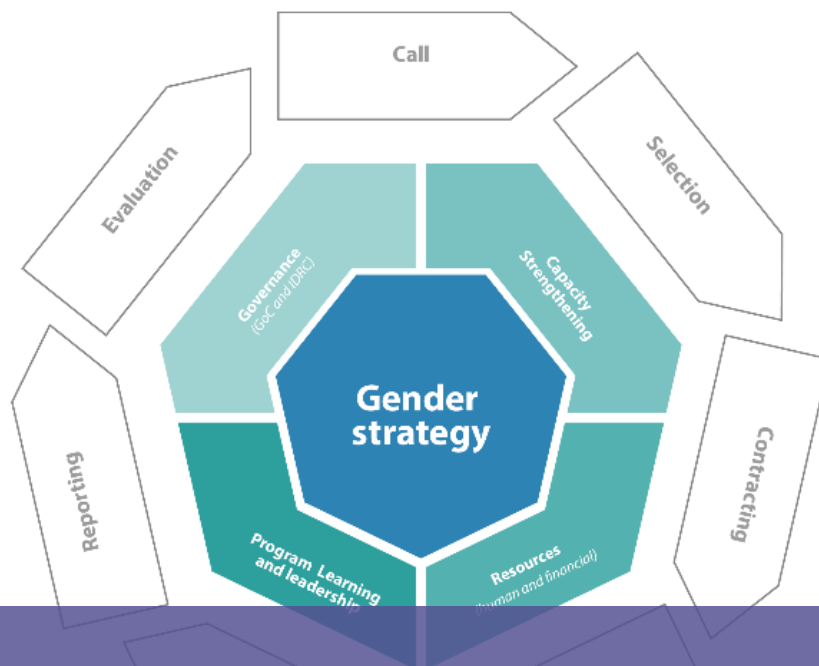

Lessons Learned Synthesis Paper: Gender Integration and the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund

Contents

1) Introduction

This paper presents an overview of main findings of perspectives and lessons on integrating efficiently and effectively gender in research and development programs. These have been gleaned from the gender synthesis of the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (CIFSRF) undertaken by KIT the Royal Tropical Institute[1].

In particular, this synthesis of the program addresses five main questions.

- What have been the various approaches used to support the integration of gender in the AFS portfolio of projects at different stages of the program?
- What has worked well and what has not worked so well? Why?
- How do these strategies compare with what other actors in the research for development space are using?
- What lessons can we learn from these strategies on how to meaningfully integrate gender in a portfolio of projects?
- How can we more efficiently and effectively ensure gender integration and the use of gender transformative approaches in agriculture and food security research for development?

CIFSRF is a CAD$124.5 million research for development programme implemented by Canada's International Development Research Centre (IDRC) and Global Affairs Canada (GAC[2]) over nine years (2009 to 2018) and two phases. The programme aims to improve food security and nutrition through applied, collaborative, results-oriented research that informs development practice. To date, CIFSRF has conducted six calls for proposals and funded 39 projects implemented in 24 countries by 20 Canadian organisations working in partnership with 40 southern organisations.

While Phase 1, completed in March, 2015, supported 21 large applied agriculture and nutrition research projects in 20 countries, Phase 2, launched in April 2013, focused on expanding CIFSRF's research portfolio and scaling up research results and innovations to reach more people and have a greater impact on global food security. The 18 Phase 2 projects, covering 17 countries, built on previously funded CIFSRF research and also supported new innovations to be taken to scale. They aimed to improve technology development and increase agricultural productivity; improve access to resources, markets and income; or improve nutrition, or a combination of these objectives reflecting three overall Agriculture and Food Security (AFS) themes of IDRC.

The CIFSRF approach to gender integration has evolved over its nine year existence. While this evolution itself is part of the CIFSRF story, the second section of this paper describes how the program integrates gender through the funding cycle as it looks today. The third section features program-wide factors, which to some degree explain the program's evolution while the fourth outlines key points for discussion. Section 5 provides a conclusion and recommendations.

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[1] This paper is based on a review of over 70 CIFSRF documents as well as interviews with 11 former and current IDRC staff involved with CIFSRF as well as one informant from Global Affairs Canada. KIT has also undertaken a gender synthesis of CIFSRF projects (Danielsen et al., 2018) from which this paper draws, particularly perspectives from grantees.

[2] For the purposes of this brief, CIDA and DFAT-D are collectively referred to as GAC, the current name for Government of Canada's department that leads Canada's international development and humanitarian assistance. CIDA and DFAT-D are used when referring to a specific period of time for this government body.

2) Gender Integration and the Funding Cycle

As a program funding research for development in food security and nutrition (FSN), CIFSRF assumed an archetype gender mainstreaming approach (for example see Overholt et al., 1985 and Prügl and Lustgarten, 2006) by integrating gender issues throughout the funding cycle, following the main phases of proposal calls and grant implementation (see Figure 1). Moreover, as elaborated below, what features well with the IDRC approach is an overall *consistency* and *continuity* along the program funding cycle. Although there are exceptions within CIFSRF, this consistency is not the usual case in development programming. Elsewhere, others have noted inconsistent and uneven gender mainstreaming (Sweetman, 2015).

This section explains the main CIFSRF approach to support integration of gender issues in funded projects.
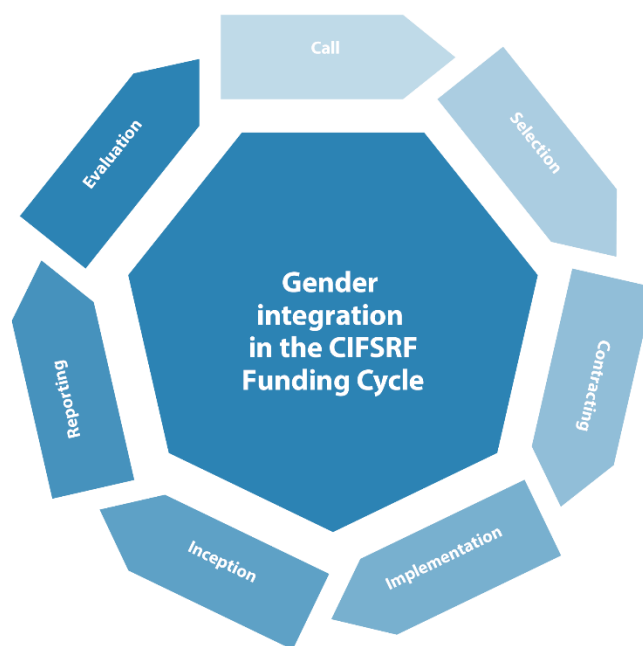
Calls for and Selection of Proposals

CIFSRF has been successful in being *consistently clear about targeting women* as agents, small-holder farmers, consumers, beneficiaries and clients. This is evident in all of the **calls for proposals** as well as **evaluation criteria** for selecting funded projects. Furthermore the calls are explicit, albeit to varying degrees, about why gender issues matter to FSN and why projects need to be designed to promote the consideration of women's specific *needs* in the design of research, the *participation* of women in the research activities, and the potential *impact* of the research on women. These three themes - women's needs, participation and impact - are consistently recurring in CIFSRF's funding documents and tools.

Moreover, call documents state how proposals are required to demonstrate that gender concerns are integrated in the research design. Such requirements and their emphasis, however, have changed over time. For example, Calls 1-3 required social analysis but this is not required thereafter. The level of required detail also varied with, for example, gender strategies obligatory starting in Call 4, the need for gender disaggregated data explicitly mentioned in Calls 2 and 3 while gender analysis as required in Calls 1, 4 and 6.

The design of the **proposal templates** facilitated the provision of required gender-related information and acted as *a trigger for applicants to better consider* the gender dimensions of their research, if they had not already.

The proposal appraisal process considered how gender was integrated in projects where **evaluation grids** included sections on "Special attention to women" (Calls 1-5) and, in Call 6, gender as a cross-cutting theme along with environmental impact and good governance. The scoring for "Special attention to women" was weighted, as a percentage of the overall score, differently across the calls. The lowest weighting was for Call 6, where it was one of three cost-cutting themes that counted for 15% of the overall score. For other calls, "Special attention to women" counted between 12.5% to 16.67%. Call 4 gave the maximum weighting of 12.5% for attention to women plus 20% for research relevance with a special emphasis on women and children. The **Scientific Advisory Committee** (SAC), which reviews and recommends proposals for funding, is comprised of men and women members from diverse geographic, linguistic, and professional backgrounds as well as a gender specialist.

Grant agreements further reinforced the importance of addressing cross-cutting themes of gender, environment and, later governance, as part of their grantee conditions with IDRC.

The lessons-learned from integrating gender in the calls and selection stages are that

- Providing clarity in funding documents serves to *clearly communicate* to applicants what is expected and the basis upon which their proposals are assessed. Thus it functions as a "hook" to hang later discussions, should applicants be successful, for further strengthening of gender integration in research design and implementation. The requirements also act as triggers for applicants to consider their approach to gender integration and bringing in additional resources, such as appropriate partners or specific gender expertise, as required.
- The consistency of women as targets across calls lays the basis for a common thread across all CIFSRF-funded projects. It also facilitated gender integration with Phase 2 projects that were linked to Phase 1 projects. Moreover it supports the potential for impacting women as a collective program result.
- The inclusion of criteria for "Special attention to women" in the proposal appraisal process and the SAC having gender expertise helped to maintain the program's emphasis on women. The criteria in particular acted as catalyst for interrogating and better understanding the gender dimensions of each proposal. During the earlier calls, it appears that "gender" was not considered as part of the overall discussion of the SAC when appraising proposals. This seems, however, to have improved with later calls and, in some cases, the criteria for "Special attention to women" then seemed to stimulate helpful deliberations among SAC members.
- Consistency in targeting women and clear criteria, however, according to at least one informant, do not necessarily ensure that funded proposals have thoroughly integrated gender concerns in their projects. There still seems to have been some scope for either token integration or seeing gender issues as incidental to and separate from the research design. The diminishing of the emphasis on women seems to have been exacerbated when other critical issues or program aims, such as scaling up or good governance, took precedence.
- Representation of the SAC could be expanded to include representation of women's interests, such as members from women's rights organisations, as suggested by one informant, which could go some way to ensuring these remain in the forefront of CIFSRF programming.

Program Implementation

Program partners are all offered an opportunity to participate in a week-long **inception workshop** with fellow grantees. This workshop includes a gender session, which was extended to a half-day by Call 6. During the gender session, designed and delivered by IDRC Project Officers (POs), the rationale and conceptual approaches for integrating gender issues in FSN research are presented and discussed and, when relevant, participants' project level gender strategies are also included. These workshops appear successful, as confirmed by both IDRC and grantee informants, in providing an opportunity for IDRC to confirm and clarify its gender strategy as well as for participants to connect as team members, particularly in the case of them coming from different countries. Also, the coming together provided an opportunity for different project teams to share experiences and strategies for gender integration. One mediating factor of the effectiveness of the inception workshops seems to be who attends from the project teams and, relatedly, the extent of follow-up after the workshops with respective teams who were not present.

During implementation, **POs play critical roles** in following-up, coaching, sharing resources and providing feedback on research design, tools and findings. As the critical interfaces between IDRC and grantees, especially during annual project visits, they play a mentoring role with some providing hands-on training to strengthen partners' capacities. POs are well placed to share experiences, strategies and resources among projects, particularly among researchers. Some can be considered as project team members by grantees and, having established rapport and trust, have at times played mediating roles within teams. Additionally, being familiar with projects and project teams as well as having a certain latitude as POs, they are able to allow for flexibility, such as in re-allocating resources in order to better support gender integration in the project. Part of the PO role is to also know and understand the appropriate level of interaction with grantees so as to avoid interference and possible confusion of roles while, at the same time, being value-added support.

POs themselves have varying levels of interest in and capacities to support partners with gender integration. Moreover, having to address a number of other issues besides gender integration and having to forward different IDRC policy directives, POs are limited to the degree they can support grantees in any one area more generally and gender in particular. That there appears relatively low turn-over of POs working on CIFSRF allows for continuity with grantees as well as within the AFS team.

The main lessons learned from integrating gender in program implementation are

- The importance of building upon the emphasis on women in calls and evaluation criteria
- This needs to be combined with program support to align understanding of the rationale for this, among grantees and IDRC, right from the start of project implementation
- That support is needed thereafter and can take different forms, which requires POs having established trusting relationships with grantees.

Program Reporting and Evaluation

Grantees' prepare **six-month updates and annual surveys and technical reports** to IDRC. **Guidelines** for these reports include specific requests for sex-disaggregated data as well as highlighting gender issues related to intended beneficiaries (e.g., design for, participation of and impact on women, with latter focusing on income, drudgery and diets) and research staff (e.g., participation in gender training). POs use these reports to complete Project Monitoring Reports, which includes a section on women's needs, participation and impact.

Grantees' **interim and annual reports** feed into CIFSRF's overall monitoring and annual reporting for both GAC and the IDRC board, which also includes data from grantees' annual (sex-disaggregated) quantitative surveys as well as from **final technical reports** submitted by grantees. Some interviewed grantees suggested interim and annual reports could be better utilized by POs as a basis for feedback and engagement.

Annual IDRC reports do well to consistently include gender disaggregated data and report against gender strategies of the program. Reporting is always based on the CIFSRF Performance Monitoring Framework (PMF), which includes both gender differentiated indicators (such as number of women, men, girls and boys) and gender aware indicators (e.g., "gender sensitive research applications").

Program evaluation reports include gender considerations, albeit to different degrees. The 2012 mid-term report paid cursory attention to the program's focus on women but did note the need for greater

Gender Synthesis of the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (KIT, 2018)

attention to improve grantees' capacities to integrate gender concerns, a finding that apparently informed the design of Phase 2 (Abitol et al., 2016). The 2016 evaluation substantially covers CIFSRF's increased efforts, particularly its dedicated grant to systematically increase grantees' capacities, and confirms that most projects were contributing to women's increased access to resources and nutritional benefits and, for some, increased decision-making.

Overall, CIFSRF appears to have thoroughly integrated gender issues throughout its monitoring, reporting and evaluation, at program and, to a lesser degree, at project levels, with requirements for sex-disaggregated and gender-related data. Where this has been deficient, remedial actions were taken such as the case of the 2012 mid-term report with IDRC pointing out to the evaluators of the lack of assessment of gender integration in CIFSRF.
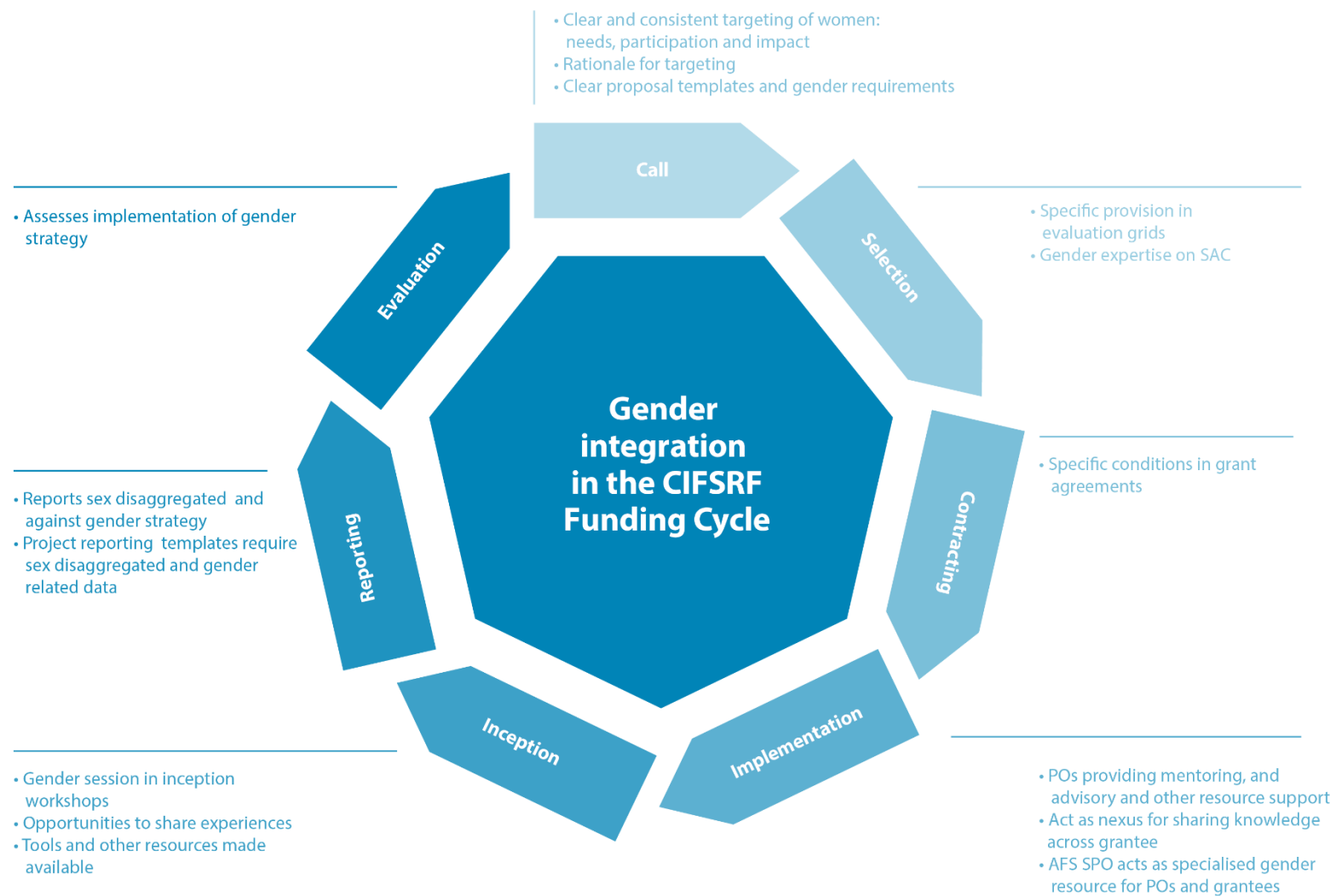
One area that would benefit the program as a whole, as noted by different informants, would be the introduction of program-wide indicators. Currently CIFSRF lacks a set of common indicators that can support assessing change at the level of the overall program. While the PMF includes indicators, they are not necessarily aligned with project measurements. While the program is a collection of projects, conceiving it as an initiative contributing to one overall theory of change, with a set of gender-related indicators, could support the claim of change beyond these individual projects. This would also allow for better comparison across projects and more in-depth and nuanced understanding of social change, which, according to one informant, the current focus on numbers of women and men does not allow. Of course, this is not an easy task, despite the availability of pre-set gender indicators related to AFS (Batliwala and Pittman, 2010).

The main lessons learned from integrating gender in program reporting and evaluation are

- Requirements for sex-disaggregated and gender-related data need to be clear for project reports to be engendered
- This allows for program reports to report against gender indicators in the PMF and against the gender strategy
- Program assessments need to intentionally include gender issues as they are not automatically included even if the program has a gender strategy

In summary, CIFSRF integrates gender prompts throughout its funding cycle. Figure 2 highlights these key features.

Figure 2 Key Gender Prompts in the CIFSRF Funding Cycle

• Clear and consistent targeting of women:
  needs, participation and impact
• Rationale for targeting
• Clear proposal templates and gender requirements

Call

Selection

• Specific provision in
  evaluation grids
• Gender expertise on SAC

Evaluation

• Assesses implementation of gender
  strategy

Gender integration in the CIFSRF Funding Cycle

Contracting

• Specific conditions in grant
  agreements

Reporting

• Reports sex disaggregated and
  against gender strategy
• Project reporting templates require
  sex disaggregated and gender
  related data

Inception

Implementation

• Gender session in inception
  workshops
• Opportunities to share experiences
• Tools and other resources made
  available

• POs providing mentoring, and
  advisory and other resource support
• Act as nexus for sharing knowledge
  across grantee
• AFS SPO acts as specialised gender
  resource for POs and grantees

3) Program-wide Factors

Apart from engendering of the funding cycle, CIFSRF has adopted four approaches to support gender integration in the program and funded projects (see Figure 3). These included Gender Strategies, Governance, Capacity Strengthening, Program Learning and Resources. The have served to not only provide an enabling environment for gender integration throughout the funding cycle, but to also support on-going learning and adaption in the program itself.

Figure 3 *Gender integration in CIFSRF and program-wider factors*
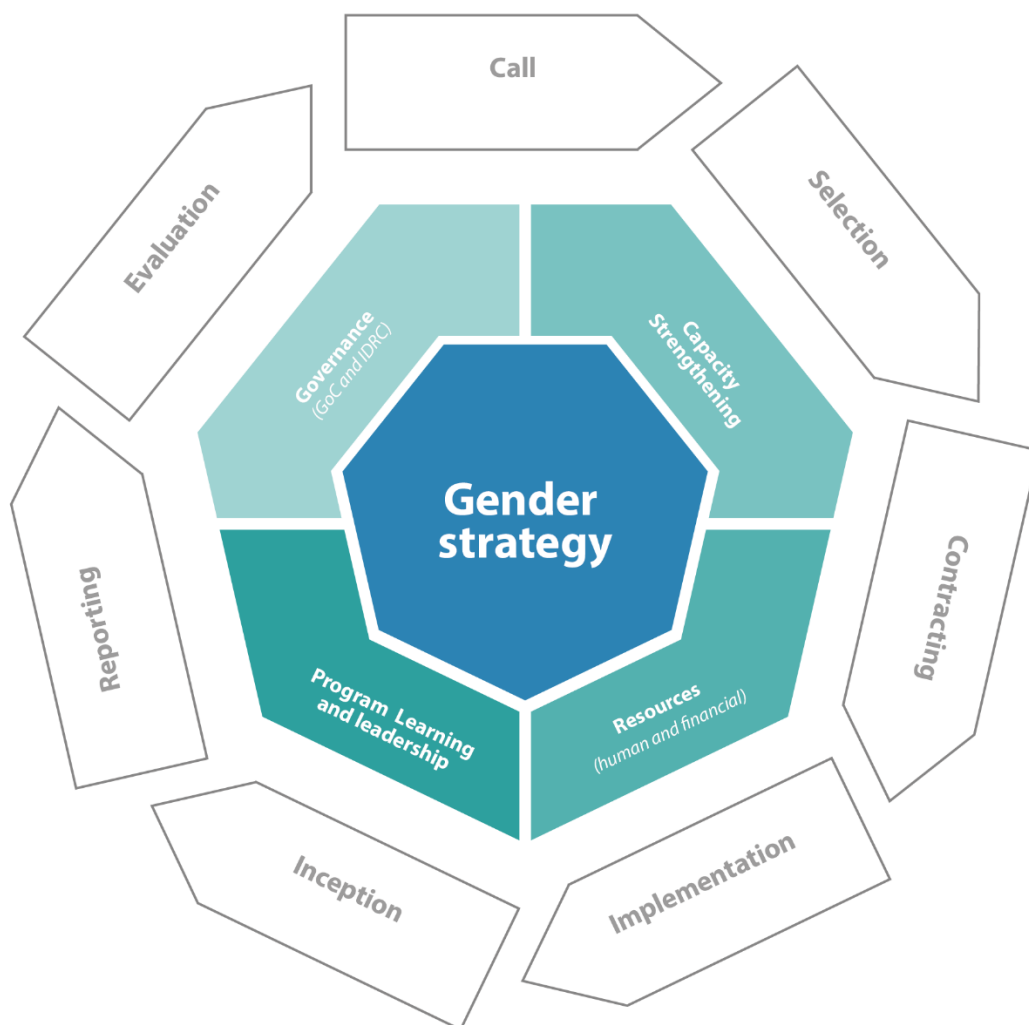
CIFSRF and AFS Gender Strategies

CIFSRF has been guided by two different strategies: the CIFSRF strategy (2012-2014) and the AFS strategy (2015 to present). The *CIFSRF strategy*, established three years after the start of the program, focused on gender integration in research with the aim of improving programming and delivery of gender outcomes. With its focus on capacity strengthening of project staff, co-learning and sharing as well as generating and disseminating evidence of gender outcomes, it primarily focused on four activities: gender audits, capacity building workshops, peer learning and research products.

The *AFS strategy* departs from its predecessor with its aims of promoting gender responsive programming, increasing AFS program quality, efficiency and impact and building evidence. It also differs in its inclusion of a gender transformative agenda and in its emphasis on support for AFS grantees in providing accessible guidelines and tools to support gender integration. The strategy emphasizes engendering the research process as well as organisational processes (e.g., leadership, commitment, culture and staffing), which together can produce gender outcomes in programming (such as equitable access to technologies, resources, markets and services; positive changes in social and gender norms and relations; equitable intra-household food allocations; and women's empowerment) and in the organisation (increased organisational capacity and influence on grantees and partners).

These strategies have succeeded in providing a **vision** for the program as well as **road map** for program staff and are acknowledged by IDRC informants as one of the key facilitating factors in supporting gender integration. The AFS strategy in particular seems to have played a catalytic role in further aligning and mobilizing IDRC staff, and presumably grantees. It signals a continued if not increased and more informed commitment to a founding principle of the program, the targeting of women in AFS.

This can be attributed to the AFS strategy having been built on current practice within the program and funded projects. In other words, while the CIFSRF strategy was meant to inform future plans, the AFS strategy confirms strategic dimensions already in place and is explicitly based on lessons learned from the program. Additionally, that the two strategies differ, with the latter indicating an evolution in understanding of and approach to gender integration, is a testament to the overall evolution and increasing sophistication of the CIFSRF.

Governance: organizational alignment and complementarity

GAC and IDRC have proven to be complimentary partners in establishing and managing CIFSRF by bringing their own comparative advantages. GAC, with its focus on development results, offers an emphasis on demonstrable changes in people's lives as a result of research; IDRC brings research rigour in investigating solutions that enhance food security and nutrition. While at times perceived as onerous, informants suggest that GAC's monitoring requirements helped to retain a focus of the program on actual research outcomes for intended beneficiaries.

Both organizations' commitment to and experience with promoting and integrating gender equality issues, particularly prior to 2006, set the basis for the initial commitment to and interest in targeting women and brought the ability to incorporate lessons from previous experience. In particular, the main CIFSRF advocates from CIDA and IDRC who established the program are manifestations of this synergy. They had worked together on a previous program and brought forth the lessons they learned from their earlier attempts to integrate gender issues. Moreover, having developed rapport and mutual trust from

that experience, the senior program leaders were able to constructively engage in differences that understandably arise from two organisations collaborating in the same program but from somewhat different points of departure. This made for productive and creative tensions.

Program Learning and Leadership

The evolution of the program over its nine years s facilitated by CIFSRF senior management, who play a critical role by keeping gender on the agenda and consistently inquiring about its integration. They also foster IDRC as a learning organization, manifested in an openness to and support for new ideas as well as observing what is working and not.

There emerges, with such leadership, a work culture that allows for sharing and communicating, gives space for learning and that engenders passion for gender work. Iterative program learning is facilitated by a reflective and an open work context at IDRC. Formally CIFSRF staff share, albeit to varying degrees, responsibility for promoting gender integration in the program, for example by being able to deliver the gender module during project-level inception workshops. They meet to exchange experiences at least annually as well as informally, particularly those based in Ottawa. Regular staff meetings serve as an opportunity to focus on gender concerns in the program.

Leadership is often lacking with gender mainstreaming initiatives, particularly at senior management levels (Verloo, 2001). Moreover, the quality of leadership is critical (Sweetman, 2015; Wong, 2006). What the CIFSRF case demonstrates is that senior management commitment and leadership was a guiding influence throughout the life of the program not only in terms of keeping gender on the agenda but also by fostering a work environment conducive for learning, adapting and challenging.

Capacity strengthening

CIFSRF's approach to strengthening of capacities of grantees started with stand-alone training workshops (such as gender learning workshops in 2012 and 2013; gender themes in communication training 2011 and 2013/14), and home-based assignments by external consultants, such as gender audits. This evolved to a more systematic tailored approach to CIFSRF projects that was conceived as a package of linked and mutually reinforcing capacity strengthening and learning activities and implemented by ALINe and SD Direct. Managed as a 12-month grant, the gender support initiative focused on gender analysis, gender integration, stakeholder engagement as well as monitoring, evaluation and learning that was made available to 26 AFS projects. Key features included gender audits; different capacity strengthening interventions including workshops, field accompaniment and virtual support (in the form of coaching, webinars, tools and other resources) as well as establishing and undertaking project-based action plans for gender integration.

Internal assessment of the initiative indicates the majority of participants gaining and applying learnings resulting from it, and to a large extent confirmed by interviews with project partners. In particular, the main benefits were the action plans that provided the basis for tailored-support as well as opportunities for learning among grantees. One noteworthy learning for grantees is the increased appreciation for and value of social sciences to AFS, particularly among researchers with dominant bio-physical research orientations. In this sense the capacity strengthening efforts seem to have bridged epistemological divides that can stymie gender integration efforts (for example, see Danielsen and Wong, 2013). While this greater appreciation for the value of addressing gender issues in AFS research resulted in many

cases of building in gender expertise, sometimes such resources were either siloed within the project or not given attention commensurate to other issues, as indicated for example with hiring of junior staff to be responsible for integration gender in the research. To its credit, however, CIFSRF staff had observed this tendency and took measures, such as ensuring both PIs and gender researchers attended capacity strengthening events.

One capacity strengthening initiative that was less successful were the different approaches to support project teams from distance. Gender audits were virtually undertaken in 2012. Gender peer-learning support groups were established following the 2013 gender learning workshop in Johannesburg. And webinars were part of the gender support initiative in 2016 and 2017. Providing support from afar required engagement by project participants, which was less than expected. While there was initial involvement, sustaining this proved difficult. Also, the 2012 provision of support was not in situ (unlike the in-country visits in 2016) and proved limited due to the lack of contextualization of the assistance. As at least one informant noted, perhaps the program could have been more strategic and targeted in working with virtual learning and knowledge approaches, such as better segmenting different audiences and designing such exchanges accordingly (Sethi, 2017).

Resources

Internally CIFSRF has incorporated gender capacities among team members. Initially this was more of an informal arrangement with two members taking the lead for gender initiatives, such as establishing the CIFSRF gender strategy, in addition to their responsibilities as POs. Later a senior program officer (SPO), with extensive experience in gender and agriculture research, was intentionally hired with a specific mandate for leading gender integration in AFS. Additionally POs were hired for their experience if not interest in social dimensions of AFS research, and the SPO also served as an internal resource for AFS, although not formally part of this position.

Furthermore, financial resources have also been earmarked for gender integration activities, as outlined in each Annual Workplan that accompanies each annual report. These follow the contours of respective gender strategies indicating financial commitments. While the need to resource plans seems common sense, this good practice within CIFSRC should not be taken for granted. Often gender mainstreaming policies and plans have foundered due to the lack of allocation of sufficient financial resources (Moser, 2006) or allocated-funds being used for other purposes.

The program also succeeded with intentionally bringing in specific gender expertise to the program. Again, such a decision, while common sense, is not always obvious nor successfully executed[3]. The hiring of a gender specialist was cited by informants, along with the AFS gender strategy, as one of the most critical initiatives in furthering gender integration in the program. The above-mentioned SPO brought in-depth knowledge of and experience with integrating gender in AFS research. This built on and deepened already existing practice but in more systematic, informed and practical ways. As an internal resource, for both colleagues and grantees, the SPO is able to point to literature and tools, advise and provide hands-on technical support, all within the context of the program. This is a particular comparative

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[3] There is a whole body of literature on the experiences and politics of gender specialists in organisations and programmes. For example see Cornwall et al., 2007 and Eyben and Turquet, 2013.

advantage that an internal resource brings as opposed to someone external to IDRC brought in on an as-needed-basis.

That such a resource appears well integrated into the program is also an achievement. Elsewhere, gender specialists have experienced being marginalized and, in some cases, undermined (Moser and Moser, 2005). Within AFS, the SPO added to, rather than displaced, knowledge and experience already in place with existing program staff. She is recognised as the "go to" person, in the first instance, for advice and support to POs, then, as needed, for direct intervention when beyond the capacity of the PO. That the AFS program has hired an additional gender specialist is testament to the success of the first SPO with specific gender expertise.

4) Efficiency and Effectiveness: points for discussion

Overall, the synthesis brought to the fore a consistent and thorough integration of gender concerns within the program. Still, particularly with the benefit of hindsight and an appreciation for the original context in which CIFSRF evolved, a number of points for discussion concerning the efficiency and effectiveness have arisen. These are outlined in this section with the intent on stimulating discussion within the program. This first part provides a basis for comparison, by highlighting an example of another similar program, the CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems (AAS). This is followed by four main points considering the effectiveness of the focus of CIFSRF on women and gender integration and the efficiency of learning processes internal to CIFSRF and IDRC more generally.

CGIAR Research Program on Aquatic Agricultural Systems

AAS is one of the pioneers to adopt GTAs to agriculture research. As a 3.5 year program that ended in 2015, it aimed to improve the well-being of people who depend on aquatic agricultural systems. Implemented by WorldFish, Bioversity and IWMI, AAS worked in in 5 countries (Bangladesh, Cambodia, Philippines, Zambia and the Solomon Islands) and had a budget of USD68.5M.

AAS adopted a Research in Development (RinD) framework where research is "embedded in on-going development actions and processes, and add[ing] value by leveraging potential for innovation" (CGIAR-IEA, 2015: 10). The intentional use of this approach was seen as an alternative to mainstream AR4D, or what the program considered as "business as usual". This was in recognition that despite agriculture research's scientific and productivity contributions, "the sustainability and equity of its impacts have been questioned in relation to its ability to benefit women, the poorest of the poor and socioeconomically marginalized groups" (McDougall, Cole et al. 2015: 41). In this respect, RinD was not only seen as an alternative to mainstream AR4D, but also a way of influencing mainstream approaches.

RinD was comprised of four inter-related elements: GTAs, participatory action research (PAR), commitment to people and place as well as facilitating learning and networking. As part of the overall AAS Program Theory of Change, GTAs were expected to lead to a social enabling environment fostering

more equitable and lasting agricultural development outcomes (Kantor 2013) while gender equality was one of seven research themes[4].

GTAs were adopted to better understand "gender and the visible manifestations of gender inequalities and inequities" and to "catalyse shifts in the norms, attitudes, and formal and informal rules that underpin these visible manifestations of inequality" (McDougall, Cole et al. 2015: 42). It was seen as an alternative to gender mainstreaming approaches, with their focus on women's participation in and access to technologies. In recognition of the loss of a political and social change agenda from mainstream gender and development practice , the "gender and socially transformative aspect of RinD is expected to contribute to a stronger foundation for more equitable and lasting contributions of research to development processes" (McDougall et al., 2015: 41).

In this respect, GTAs represent a difference in framing and purpose of gender in development work. Unlike gender integration that focuses on visible gaps, GTAs frame the "problem" differently by focusing on the "formal and informal institutions underlying the visible gender or social gaps — in particular, on (gendered) social norms, attitudes, practices, processes, and rules or policies" (Douthwaite et. al 2015: 42). In particular, AAS' GTAs focused on gender relations, with an acknowledgement of the need to work with women and men and understand them as heterogeneous categories. Working with women and men entailed encouraging critical awareness of social inequalities and the challenging and changing of power relations among them and in communities (AAS 2012).

AAS's gender work was guided by a gender strategy, established in 2012, one year after its start. Its main activities included a diagnosis and design (gender and social analysis, community visioning, GTAs workshop and program design), implementation (identify partners, develop and implement detailed RinD designs), communication and engagement as well as ongoing capacity development. The latter was underpinned by an organizational culture approach comprised of three dimensions of transformative learning, socio-technical regimes and governance (macro-level trends and contextual drivers, social structures) and organizational culture and learning. It envisioned three nested (inter-related) pathways of transformation in terms of individual, organizational and system or social structure (Sarapura Escobar and Puskur 2014).

With the benefit of AAS' lessons learned, four points of discussion are now considered: targeting women, meanings of gender, timing and institutionalising gender[i].

Targeting of women

While one identified strength of the program is its explicit focus on women from its early conception, women as a target are simultaneously differentiated and homogenised in CIFSRF reports. They are differentiated in terms of their roles in AFS as agents of change, primary or key clients, consumers, (central) beneficiaries, stakeholders and/or users. Women are also discussed in homogenous terms save for the occasional reference to women as "most insecure" or "vulnerable", as implied in the conflation of "women and children" (i.e., Calls 4 and 5). There is little account in CIFSRF documents and tools of intersecting inequalities based on class, caste, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity or other

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[4] The remaining six included Sustainable increase in system productivity, Equitable access to markets, Social-ecological resilience and adaptive capacity, Policies and institutions to empower AAS users, Knowledge sharing, learning and innovation and Nutrition.

mediating and intersecting social markers let alone what this means for the different FSN roles outlined previously. This not only implies a need for CIFSRF to be categorically specific in which women it aims to target, but also for an understanding of how different women are differently positioned socially as well as within agriculture and food systems.

Additionally, absent in CIFSRF's targeting of women are the contexts within which women are embedded, mainly social relations of gender, particularly in reference to relations of production (Farnworth et al., 2013). This is not only to suggest the need for an explicit inclusion of men, but more critically an understanding of the social positionings of women as mediated by their social relations (Okali, 2012) as well as the diversity among men.

An intersectional understanding of women and men and social relations of gender are particularly critical to actualize AFS' ambition of taking on a gender transformative approach to AFS research. This is a clear feature of AAS' conceptualisation of GTA.

Meanings of gender

Similarly the CIFSRF program at times could benefit from unpacking of the gendered assumptions within its theories of change[5] (see for example KIT and SNV, 2016). Project and program reports make claims that require further interrogating not only as to their validity but also their risk of worsening the position of women, particularly from their tendency to homogenize women and assume particular cause-and-effects. For example, technical innovations are assumed to automatically benefit women either by reducing drudgery or empowering them. This can also be seen in ambitions such as "Investing in small-scale agriculture is one of the most effective ways to decrease poverty and meet the food security needs of vulnerable populations in developing countries, especially women" (Internal Document. IDRC, 2011). Another example of such assumptions is that employing improved nutrition as a key indicator will result in targeting women and women small-holder farmers (Internal Document. IDRC, 2012). Phase 2 annual reports emphasize the targeting of "women and girls as the primary change agents and central beneficiaries, recognizing that women and girls are most food insecure despite being the main food producers in developing countries" (Internal Document. IDRC, 2015, 2016 and 2017). Such repetition of gender and development tropes do little to unpack particular myths and fables (Cornwall et al., 2007) that serve to ossify gender roles, by essentialising them, rather than to open the possibility of transforming social relations of gender. What we can learn from AAS is the benefits of being conceptually grounded and clear at the inception, even if the details of the program approach are unknown, for this gives a strong direction for the unfolding and evolution of the approach.

Timing

As noted above, the program evolved its approach to and support for gender integration. Gender criteria for CIFSRF funding increased and became more detailed. Capacity strengthening became more systematic and tailored. The gender strategy became more visionary and integrated.

On the one hand, many of these program design features could have been introduced earlier in the life of CIFSRF. This is not just a matter of hindsight being 20/20, but harnessing insights from nearly 15 years of experience with gender mainstreaming since it becoming part of development discourse in 1995. In

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[5] "Theories" is used in plural to recognise that until 2017, when a formal TOC was established, CIFSRF was operating with an implicit TOC.

particular, informants spoke of the need to have had the initial gender strategy earlier than 2012. This reflection becomes more critical when the phasing of projects and calls are taken into account: given that many Phase 2 projects emerged from previous calls, having a stronger and clearer strategy in principle could have shaped these predecessor projects. For example, this may have resulted in a different allocation of resources that retro-fitting budgets did not always allow, according to one informant. Additionally, while lessons were acquired and the program adapted in part due to the conducive learning environment in IDRC, learning could have been more strategic and intentional, as one informant suggested.

On the other hand, one has to take into account the initial conditions and focus of Phase 1. The focus was on food security and the initial CIFSRF Performance Monitoring Framework was established before any projects were funded. Moreover, Call 1 was developed in a short timeframe in response to the global food crisis and the need to respond urgently.

Also the period when CIFSRF was created needs to be taken into account. In Canada, there reigned a government that was less supportive than previous governments, if not antithetical, to gender equality, and CIDA's gender equality work was faltering. Moreover, gender mainstreaming is by definition a process: that CIFSRF took an iterative and learning-by-doing approach, whether by design or not, bodes well for a more organic process of strategy building. By the time the AFS strategy was established, many of its features were already in place making its implementation almost a foregone conclusion. Familiarity with, if not ownership for, its strategic direction and introduction of a gender transformative approach lay the basis for a much more receptive context than, for example, if the strategy was conceived as was the CIFSRF strategy. That the Canadian government introduced its Feminist International Assistance policy two years later only serves to open the way for IDRC to pursue a gender transformative research agenda. What we can take away from the AAS experience is the importance of initially setting the ambitions for GTA, even if the operationalities have been undefined. As with CIFSRF, these details were developed iteratively though a process of learning by doing. Still, setting such an ambition early frames the direction of such learning.

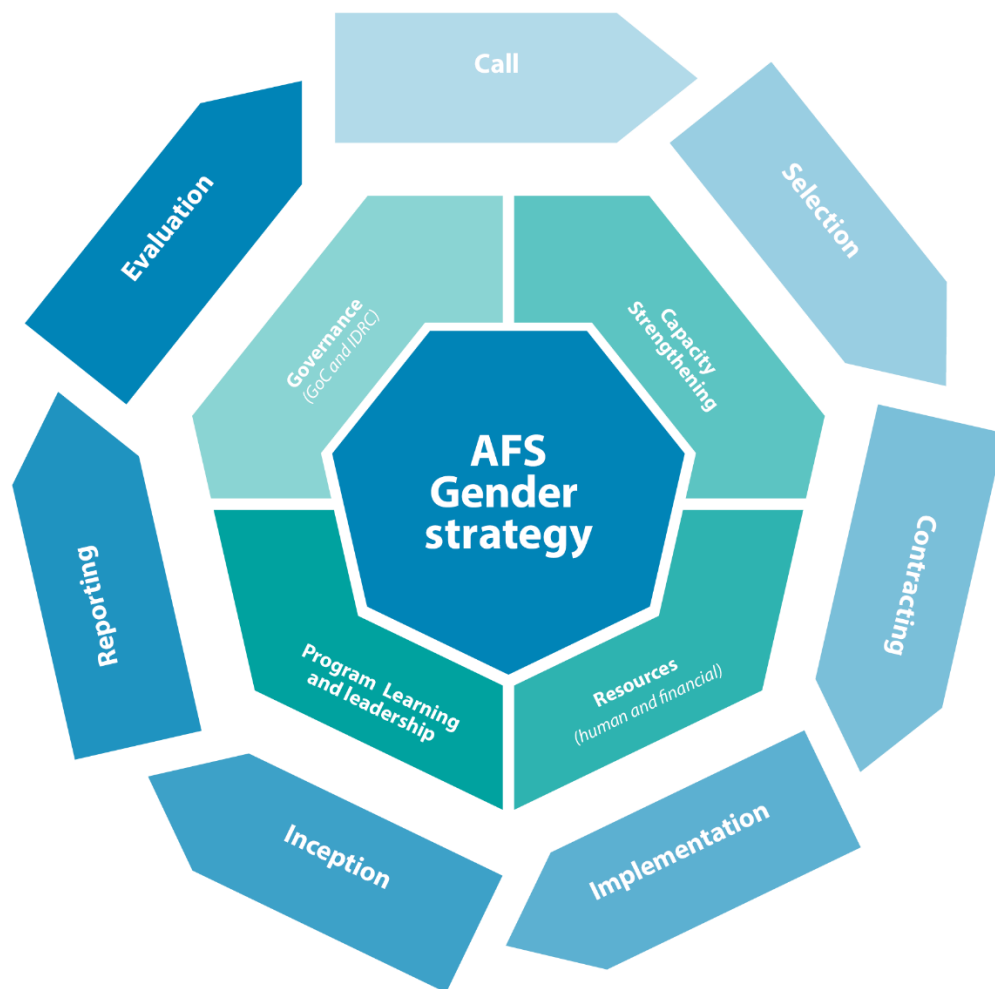## Institutionalising gender transformative research at IDRC

CIFSRF managed to successfully implement gender mainstreaming throughout its research funding process with the support of program-wide factors. This work, however, has remained to a large extent with the AFS program and did not extend to other IDRC programs such as maternal and child care. Not only is this a missed opportunity for cross-program learning, but also a risk in that gender integration remains vulnerable to vicissitudes of national politics, organisations and personnel.

Moreover, the success of gender integration efforts in the program is anchored on the governmentality of funding. The tools at hand – call criteria, grant agreements, reporting requirements, monitoring protocol – can be seen as instruments of power of CIFSRF as a grant making body. Inherent in these are power dynamics that potentially can belie the ambitions of the AFS strategy of change in program as well as organizational processes to produce gender transformative outcomes. The challenge for IDRC is to use its position as funder, and the power bestowed upon the organization, in productive ways. The Canadian Feminist International Assistance Policy, while limited in its gender transformative potential (CCIC, 2017), offers one entry point.

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5) Conclusion and recommendations

The CIFSRF program offers a rich case study of how gender integration can be promoted and supported in AR4D. This is evident in the consistent and continual integration of gender concerns in the funding cycle. Moreover, the program complemented this with key program-wide support initiatives, as illustrated in Figure 4.

Figure 4 *Gender integration in CIFSRF*

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Recommendations

The AFS program should:

- **actively design a collaborative research and intentional learning agenda to conceptualise, articulate and implement a gender transformative strategy**. The existing AFS gender strategy recognizes that some CIFSRF projects could be moving towards gender transformative approaches, which is supported by the gender synthesis finding of achievement of select women's empowerment outcomes. The AFS gender strategy also acknowledges that an intentional effort is needed for the program, as a whole, and its constituent projects to be combining practical approaches with efforts to address underlying gender norms. This could serve as a basis for IDRC's AFS program to more clearly conceptualise and articulate its gender transformative approach as well as establish its operational modalities. The timing, both in terms of the internal momentum of the program as well as the external policy context, seems to be ripe.

- **actively select partners to think along in the development of a CIFSRF gender transformative strategy.** Partners clearly welcome interaction of and support from CIFSRF. In shifting the gender strategy, it will be critical to engage partners. This will likely include a collective learning and reflection process combined with continued capacity strengthening, along the lines of a multi-faceted and continual-engagement approach used with the ALINe and SD Direct initiative.

- **identify key and promising projects and partners that would comprise an initial portfolio of CIFSRF initiatives to act as pilot cases to develop the strategy**. Financial and human resources would need to be dedicated to this as well as a medium term time frame to track learning and changes longitudinally. Clearly there are cost implications for investing in partner and IDRC capacity to co-create and co-learn. This would need to be justified with a Theory of Change that envisions wider social impact with a more systematic gender approach. As well, more effective use of virtual learning and communications will need to be developed.

- **establish a robust measurement framework to measure outcomes and impacts at project levels and over and above individual projects**. This could entail a common set of quantitative and qualitative indicators against which the program and projects minimally report and be used as a basis for project and program learning. For example, a (virtual) common platform could be established for sharing achievements against indicators including analysis of achievements and deviations. This rolling database could be used for annual reflection meetings and basis for additional research and publications. By making reporting integral to learning (along with mutually-encouraging dynamics inherent with a community of practice) and accountability, quality of reporting can be enhanced.

Gender Synthesis of the Canadian International Food Security Research Fund (KIT, 2018)

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[i] While the final AAS evaluation overall found the program wanting, it also recognised the systematic application of GTA across a number of aquatic agricultural systems as well as the strong linkage to PAR, which was found to be innovative and conceptually well-grounded. This potentially contributes to an understanding of changes in gender norms, perceptions and relations and an impact beyond the program.

While the evaluation also concluded that AAS effect on AR4D practice overall remained to be demonstrated, there are a number of insights that programs such as CIFSRF can benefit from. These include GTA needing to engage with *diverse* women and men to *critically reflect* and change processes to address underlying causes of social inequity. This is a *long-term* process of social change that cannot be forced where this is no one single strategy. It does need to happen in *partnership* among community members and government and development actors including scientists. The role of researchers is to *facilitate processes of critical reflection*. An early understanding of the context is essential where GTA processes need to be integral to initial research stages (Douthwaite et al., 2015).