Engendering social science research

Project led by the Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER) – Ghana

Abstract

In recent times, social science research has increasingly aimed to be prescriptive and transformative in policy circles. However, researchers have been reluctant to include gender dynamics and employ gender analysis methodologies in their research approaches. Recognizing the importance of gender analysis to transformative research, ISSER organized a practical training workshop to enable the integration of gender theory and gender-aware solutions into the research of TTI-funded think tanks in Africa. The workshop provided a systematic methodological process for conducting gender analysis, covering gender theory and analysis, conceptual frameworks, and implications of gender-aware research for policymaking.

ON THE MATCHING FUNDS

In 2011 the Think Tank Initiative established the Matching Funds program as another source of financial support. These funds support efforts by TTI-funded think tanks to achieve their long-term objectives, and also promote peer learning and collaboration.
COLLABORATING INSTITUTIONS

ISSER organized a training workshop in gender analysis. Workshop participants were mainly from African TTI-funded institutions and included a diverse group of programme directors, research fellows and lecturers, technical officers, marketing officers, interns and students.

WHAT THEY DID AND WHY

Gender analysis is an indispensable component of any transformative research. Yet, despite nearly four decades of international commitments, the concept of “gender” and the methods for gender analysis remain contentious and they have yet to be fully integrated into orthodox research. Despite positive developments in gender-sensitive research and gradual progress toward incorporating gender considerations into research, evidence suggests that relatively little social science research contains gender analysis as a basic methodological component.

To help address this gap, ISSER organized the International Gender Analysis Training Workshop (GATW-2014). The training was funded in part by TTI Matching Funds and was held at ISSER’s Conference Centre at the University of Ghana. The objective was to contribute to engendering all social science research by training African social science researchers to integrate gender analysis into all their projects – rather than viewing such analysis as a separate research topic.

The GATW-2014 was designed as an intensive five-day training module that brought together twenty social science research participants from five countries across East, West and Central Africa. The workshop was facilitated by four high-level gender experts from the University of Ghana – some of whom are ISSER research fellows – and was aimed at providing participants with the tools and skills needed to successfully incorporate gender in research design and ultimately in the analysis of data, thereby helping to uncover how gender relations affect social problems.

Specifically, the workshop sought to:

• Familiarize participants with current gender analysis training tools;
• Promote the mainstreaming of gender analysis into basic and applied research;
• Acquaint participants with the ethical implications of gender analysis in social sciences research; and
• Raise capacity to professionally communicate gender-aware social science research to policymakers.

The GATW-2014 was delivered in an interactive and participatory manner that emphasized the involvement of end-users in the design, the planning of research proposals, and how to discuss findings and analysis in a way that is gender-sensitive. Through the training modules, participants were effectively instructed on why gender analysis – the process of investigating gender relations and assessing the different roles, activities, benefits, rights, and resources accrued to men and women – needs to be applied to all social fields of study and practice. To help them better integrate what they were learning, participants were divided into four groups, and over the course of the five days, worked together to develop concrete research project proposals. Depending on their area of interests, participants were divided into four major themes: gender analysis in governance; in education; in economics; and in agriculture and climate change research.

RESULTS
Over the course of the workshop, each thematic group developed a proposal, which they then presented to the entire workshop group for peer review. The workshop’s participatory approach gave participants the opportunity to share and gain from various perspectives, values and reasoning on choice of research topic, objectives and methodology. It also helped to build cohesion and proved to be a useful process by which to achieve consensus in a situation of differing academic, institutional and cultural backgrounds, all the while supporting the emergence of innovative ideas for mainstreaming gender in specific areas of research interest.

By the end of the training workshop, the four multi-institutional working groups were determined to further refine their ideas into full research project proposals to be submitted to IDRC and other research granting agencies for funding. ISSER will continue to support the achievement of this goal by providing oversight and technical advisory services to the research groups, such that they succeed in developing and securing funding for strong, collaborative, gender sensitive research projects.

**NEXT STEPS**

Gender training generally is an attempt to change perceptions, attitudes and behaviours that have been acquired over a very long period of time in a variety of cultural contexts. To this end the GATW-2014 cannot be seen as an end in itself, but as a part of a process in a larger context of gender mainstreaming.

Given the success of the workshop, the training modules will be compiled into generic tools, which can then be adapted to fit various major research areas and interests. ISSER intends on repeating the workshop on an annual basis as part of its Short Courses Programme, allowing new ISSER research fellows as well as interested members from other faculties at the University of Ghana and other research organizations to undergo standard training in gender analysis. It is recommended that TTI support efforts to offer such training to all grantee institutions.