

Executive summary

*Evaluation of partner-implemented
gender activities*

Maya Reggev & Femi Nzegwu,

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Executive Summary

Background and overview of INASP's gender work

In 2015 a decision was made by INASP's senior management team to incorporate gender as a core theme area into INASP's work. By the end of that year (Year 3 of the Strengthening Research and Knowledge Systems (SRKS) programme) INASP's Research Development and Support (RDS) team had embarked on piloting gender work as defined in the organization's 2016-2020 strategy.¹

The gender work focused on working mostly with existing partners around activities already being implemented, using available resources and opportunities. Although the aims were not explicitly defined at the start of the project, broadly speaking, the gender work sought to inform future programme development undertaken by INASP primarily by:

- (a) Assessing the needs and interests of the higher education (HE) community in the global south to address issues of gender.
- (b) Identifying interested partners to jointly undertake such work.

The work comprised of three streams:

- **Partner projects** which included awarding small grants to gender-related activities and travel; support of activities suggested and led by partners²; and the development and pilot of a Gender Mainstreaming in Higher Education.³
- **Organizational gender mainstreaming** included the commission of gender audits⁴; the establishment of a Gender Working Group (GWG) within INASP; and the development and implementation of a GWG action plan.
- **Enhancing support to women researchers through the AuthorAID programme** included recruiting more women researchers as mentors and online courses guest facilitators through developing links with the Organization for Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD). This stream was developed as learning from AuthorAID monitoring figures indicated that the programme was reaching more men than women.

The evaluation and findings

In this evaluation, we reviewed 16 activities implemented at 11 higher education (HE) institutions in seven countries over a period of approximately three years. Our approach included a review of documents, interviews with partners and team members, and a survey of activity organizers, facilitators and participants.

The findings of this evaluation suggest that the original objectives of INASP's gender-related work with partners have been achieved to a large extent.

Many of the activities undertaken by participants were seen as successful by the key stakeholders involved – organizers, participants and INASP staff.

Among partners there was a clear rationale for the activities that were chosen. There were clear expectations on the part of participants that they would gain knowledge and skills on gender issues that would be of benefit to them professionally and personally. These expectations were largely

¹ INASP Strategy 2016-2020 www.inasp.info/strategy

² Gender Mainstreaming in Higher education: Learning from our experiences www.authoraid.info/en/news/details/1135; Gender in higher education in Somalia www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/276; SIDRA gender policy brief www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/275

³ INASP Gender Mainstreaming in Higher Education Toolkit www.inasp.info/gendertoolkit

⁴ INASP Gender Audit: Report and Recommendations www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/264; INASP organizational gender audit: Report of findings and recommendations - executive summary www.inasp.info/en/publications/details/306

realised. There was a mix of participants – male and female (although mostly female), representing a cross section of disciplines, sectors, age groups and levels of management/decision making. Preparation and planning were crucial to the success of activities – especially in ensuring that the workshop was shaped by the levels of knowledge and expectations of participants. Organizers aspired to create a safe space for people to share experiences. Although this was largely achieved, not everyone felt comfortable about sharing their experiences.

Many participants attributed the success of these events to a number of factors including leadership, collaboration and participants' commitment. Having a clear and realistic action plan was also mentioned along with team effort and institutional commitment and support.

Some of the more prominent results of the gender activities undertaken include:

- A raised awareness of gender issues
- Gained knowledge and skills
- Establishment of peer networks for support and learning
- Development of action plans, academic modules, institutional gender policies and national recommendations
- Attitudinal changes in some participants

Some institutional effects were made evident by a noticeable discourse on gender including a growing institutional acknowledgement of the importance of gender issues.

A number of challenges were also reported including:

- The difficulty of developing a coherent and implementable action plan
- Lack of resources – especially time
- Sociological and cultural challenges

In seeking to explore and understand partner needs and how best to inform gender programming going forward, INASP adopted an approach that was flexible, adaptive and responsive. This allowed the emergence of an organic approach that was shaped by the learning and results of partner-owned and executed activities. However, the exploratory nature of the project made it more difficult to monitor, evaluate and learn from the activities.

INASP's gender programme team has gained an understanding of some gender-related needs and interests of partners in higher education (HE). This has helped shape the direction of its work on gender. INASP's gender programme is now focused on supporting gender mainstreaming to achieve greater levels of gender parity in HE institutions and in some cases nationally. They have also successfully identified interested partners who are fully committed to engaging with these issues in pursuit of change.

Recommendations

There are four key recommendations which emerge from this study. Going forward:

- The programme needs to clearly define project (gender activity) goals and objectives, especially where to channel its resources post-SRKS. Work on this is already underway.
- Tracking and monitoring mechanisms need to be embedded right from the start.
- INASP needs to make more public its range of expertise on gender available and on offer.
- Guidelines that capture key lessons learned on successfully delivering these gender workshops/activities (e.g. the need for a "safe and open space" in which to engage these issues, the importance of preparation, etc.) need to be developed and made more widely available to share what is clearly a valuable approach to addressing issues of gender parity in HE.