



Gender & Inclusivity

A PROJECT OF THE SCIENCE GRANTING COUNCILS INITIATIVE

NATIONAL SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COUNCIL, ZAMBIA

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The Gender & Inclusivity Project, a component of the Science Granting Councils Initiative (SGCI), is led by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa in partnership with Gender at Work (G@W), Jive Media Africa and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA). G@W's unique methodology, Gender Action Learning (GAL), together with the Targeted Technical Assistance (TTA) process designed by the HSRC, supports a unique participatory process that responds to councils' needs, builds partnerships and encourages ownership of the change process.

Mentorship as a tool for inclusive participation in research and innovation

The right kind of mentorship can increase the participation of women and youth in research and innovation activities and give them the skills and opportunities to aim for leadership positions.



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The fact that few women and young researchers are project team leaders has also led to a dearth of women and young innovators in research leadership positions.

In the past, the National Science and Technology Council (NSTC) has tried to address this situation in part by reviewing funding guidelines so as to provide for quotas targeting disadvantaged groups. However, such measures proved largely unsuccessful as very few of those targeted group members managed to competitively access the grants.

Challenges

Realising that funding quotas and guidelines alone were not enough to address the problem, the Gender and Inclusivity Project change team undertook to further interrogate the issues, concluding that a mentorship programme aimed at women and young researchers may be a viable method of achieving greater participation of the targeted groups. Further investigation of the mentorship concept

revealed the need for a careful approach: not only did the type of mentors used matter, but so did the environment in which the mentorship was being conducted.

Some mentees looked to their mentors as peers who had faced similar challenges, while others sought professional training from their mentors regarding practical issues such as how to put together a winning proposal. For others, the purpose of a mentor was to help build confidence and to give tips on how to better pitch project ideas.

Successes

The council sought to partner with the Zambian National STEM Foundation to host a Women in STEM Conference and a STEM Boot Camp. Here, mentees were given an opportunity to test their confidence by speaking about themselves and their work before an audience. Among the successes was the number of inquiries the council received concerning the date of the next call for funding proposals.

