Owning change:

Reflections on Peer Learning Workshop 3

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"Sharing allows one to learn from others and realise that our challenges are common and create a space to collectively address them and we can overcome them".

– **Peer Learning 3 workshop participant.**

A Gender Action Learning (GAL) workshop in late 2022, involving participants in the Science Granting Councils Initiative's Gender & Inclusivity Project, highlighted some of the benefits of the peer-learning process and helped project participants to consolidate insights gained over the project's duration.

With an emphasis on reconnecting with and building a face-to-face peer learning community, the third peer learning workshop (the first to take place in person), held in Pretoria, South Africa on 4 October 2022, was facilitated by Michal Friedman, Khanysa Mabyeka, Nina Benjamin, Eleanor du Plooy, and Olga Bialostocka – all part of the Gender at Work team leading implementation of the Gender Action Learning (GAL) process in the SGCI Gender and Inclusivity (G&I) Project.

The G&I Project aims to strengthen the capacities of science granting councils in Sub-Saharan Africa to advance systemic change towards greater gender inclusivity in the science technology and innovation (STI) sector.

A unique peer-learning methodology, GAL is underpinned by a customised, participatory process of co-creating strategies focused on individual and systemic change. The value of the process, underpinned by an intersectional gender transformative conceptual framework, is that councils' change teams identify their own areas for intervention relevant to their contexts, shape their own questions for learning and take ownership of the change process – in the form of a change project of their own.

While the first two (online) peer learning workshops helped to co-identify science granting councils' capacities and needs and the key principles and targets that informed their work in advancing gender and inclusivity, the third workshop invited deeper reflection on the G&I journey as a whole.

It was also intended to consolidate insights and learnings around gender and inclusivity and ensure confidence on the part of participants to continue the work of advancing gender and inclusivity in their respective councils going forward.

Workshop participants, representing science granting councils from South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia, were asked to use their HEAD, HEART and FEET when it came to consolidating their learning over the previous 18 months about advancing gender and inclusivity through the GAL process.

In terms of **HEAD**, participants were asked to build a collective picture of the challenges and lessons they are all facing to inform future practice and policy in their councils.

In terms of **HEART**, participants were encouraged to find deeper meaning to the stories of their journey and to leave feeling more motivated and confident about continuing their work.

In terms of **FEET**, participants were expected to leave with clear next-step action points and have a clear idea about what support they can expect from the Gender and Inclusivity Project, as they continue advancing gender transformation in their respective settings.

On the first day, participants were encouraged to think about and use symbolic objects to describe the personal significance of their involvement in the GAL process thus far.

One participant likened herself at the start of the process to clay that was "with no shape in gender issues":

Before the project, I knew little about gender. I knew that gender was about girls. As an object, I would bring artificial clay that [can be] mold[ed into] different shapes. Before the project, I was clay, with no shape in gender issues. This GAL process has changed me to another shape of thinking about G&I; it has broadened my mind. This clay can also be used to shape our councils on the way they have been thinking about gender issues.

Using the metaphor of a river to represent the GAL process and its various activities and events, individual participants and the facilitators were invited to personally reflect on all stages of the peer learning journey, ranging from the buy-in process to the Hearing our Stories (HOS) workshops, the peer learning and online accompaniment sessions, two Feminars ("Women in research: More than a numbers game" – https://sgciafrica.org/women-in-research-more-than-a-numbers-game/ and "Can artificial intelligence help to achieve inclusivity?" – https://sgciafrica.org/can-artificial-intelligence-help-to-achieve-inclusivity/) and the Technical Targeted Assistance workshop ("Tapping the change-making power of grant-making: Reflections on a targeted technical assistance workshop" – https://sgciafrica.org/tapping-the-change-making-power-of-grant-making-reflections-on-a-targeted-technical-assistance-workshop/).

Through these reflections, recognition was given to differences in individual contexts and circumstances.

Organisational stories

The workshop also focused on the sharing of organisational stories, journeys and learning during the GAL process.

Each council was encouraged to share their organisational story based on the following brief: *Building on the metaphor of a river, think about all the elements of your*

work as a council in terms of the natural elements of Earth, Water, Fire and Air. This will help you dig deeper into the meaning of the work that you do.

The brief produced a wide array of creative presentations on the work of each council, including change projects, aimed at enhancing its work around gender and inclusivity.

At the conclusion of the workshop, councils were asked to contribute towards a collective picture of what had been learned so far about doing this kind of change work in African-based SGCs.

Next steps

Council participants were asked to consider the "key learnings" they wanted to take forward from the G&I Project and to think about the support they might need to implement new ideas based on these learnings.

It was agreed that, given the importance of research grants as a tool for cultural change, the following challenges lay ahead for each of the councils:

1. Strengthening gender and inclusivity-focused grants;
2. Providing funding for research calls;
3. Capacity building in managing research calls;
4. The need for councils to provide high levels of evidence supporting the need for G&I in grant calls.

An 'unbelievable synergy'

Asked to reflect on their experience of the third peer learning workshop, one participant highlighted the benefits of meeting in-person, but noted that foundations for the process had been firmly laid through online engagements:

Throughout this experience I am learning to trust the process. Sometimes I had doubts, due to the remote format, but when we met I saw unbelievable synergy between us. We just have to trust the process when there is an intention and we have to be patient enough to see the fruits of what we are seeding.