

Gender and inclusivity in Science Granting Councils: A participatory approach to achieving sustained systemic change

Through work led by South Africa's Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the SGCI has adopted an intersectional and participatory approach to embed gender and inclusivity at SGCs. By utilizing the Gender Action Learning methodology developed by Gender at Work, the SGCI is ensuring responsiveness to councils' own gender transformation agendas and encouraging a sense of ownership of the change process as key mechanisms to stimulate both individual and systemic change.

In the last few months, 9 out of 15 SGCs have participated in several Gender Action Learning activities facilitated by Gender at Work. The first of these was a series of workshops called "Hearing our Stories"; an interactive process focused on highlighting previous work conducted by councils, and to determine where SGCs are currently at in terms of advancing gender and inclusivity transformation. This was also the start of the process to identify potential change teams within councils who would undertake small, yet meaningful, change experiments throughout the duration of implementing the SGCI theme on gender and inclusivity (G&I). These experiments are aligned with current activities within councils to allow for better uptake of change.

The second activity was a four-day intensive "Peer Learning" workshop where members of nine councils, divided into two cohorts, participated in a process aimed at surfacing their own perceptions and experiences of gender and inclusivity within their council and country contexts. This peer process and ongoing monthly online consultations offer SGCs opportunities to learn from each other. Some participants say that the process has "pulled the ground from under their feet" or that "the way we observe what is going on around us has forever changed".

SGCs are learning, some for the first time, that advancing gender and inclusivity transformation is more than creating well-structured policies, a gender balance in terms of male and female employees, or ensuring women have equal opportunities at securing research grants. Instead, ensuring sustained systemic change in relation to gender and inclusivity might take more effort at various levels, including changes in personal consciousness, attitudes and behaviors of both staff and stakeholders, as well as institutional cultural change in 'how we do things around here'.



The SGCI G&I theme aims to strengthen the capacities of SGCs to advance systemic change towards greater gender equality in the STI sector. Activities under this theme are led by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) of South Africa in partnership with Gender at Work, the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA), and Jive Media Africa.

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