

# Guidance Note: Integrating an Intersectional Gender Approach in Research

## About The Guidance Note

This Guidance Note highlights key points for integrating gender approaches in research. It uses an intersectional lens to recognize how aspects of diverse social identities such as age, class, ethnicity, geography, ability, sex and gender shape power relations in research teams and influence agenda setting of the research.

We have designed this Guidance Note for use by the individual researchers and research organizations who will be applying for a FINCAPES Applied Research Grant. You do not have to be a gender specialist or social scientist to use the Guidance Note. However, we encourage you to include a Gender and Socio-economic Equity scientist in the research team to help adapt and apply the guidance, if possible.

## Why is it necessary to mainstream gender and intersectionality into research?

In traditional research, overlooking the lived experience and views of women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous groups and other minority groups can lead researchers to unknowingly reach wrong conclusions or wind up with an incomplete picture/identification of the problem. A key challenge is that while researchers will generally examine the impact of a population on the environment they only rarely take intersectional gender dimensions in the research context into account. Demographic groups tend to be treated as aggregated, homogenous groups and do not consider women and men's different roles, asset levels and knowledge sets separately. Poverty assessments are also often based on an analysis of aggregated household incomes and expenditures with the differential experiences of poverty and control over and ownership of household assets of female and male household members rarely disaggregated and analyzed separately. Doing so will often yield highly differentiated research results. Economic data is also often only collected on productive paid work in the formal sector as this is what is valued in traditional economic analyses. However, many women work in the informal sector and this work as well that of unpaid, family labour and household work – mainly performed by women – are seldom counted in national statistics. This is despite the fact that much of this work is essential to provide food security for the household and contribute millions of dollars/rupiah to the national economy.

Consequently, in traditional research, women's experiences and contributions often remain invisible. Thus, important aspects of a research issues remain undocumented and

underestimated and, therefore, may be misunderstood. Gender has only recently been considered a significant variable in research. However, although it is starting to be recognized in social sciences, it is seldom acknowledged and applied in the natural sciences or economics. The choice of research topic, conceptual framework and methodology, analysis framework, and language used in scientific articles tends to inadvertently reflect male biases and patriarchal values.

To address intersectional gender issues in research, researchers need to apply an intersectional lens in their analysis and development of research problems, the identification of research subjects, and degree of disaggregated data needed. One component of the overall research process, the research questions, findings, and analysis thus need to include comprehensive identification of the root of problem that integrates related gender issues and groups. This may mean working to ensure inclusion of demographic groups that are often excluded from environment-related research such as diverse groups of women, Indigenous peoples, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and youth.

**This does not mean that all research should focus on these diverse demographic groups. Rather it is a question of identifying which ones need to be included to ensure accurate and representative research findings.** For example, in the case of climate change research, Indigenous women are often not invited to participate but they play important roles as keepers of traditional knowledge about forest management and sustainability as well as traditionally serve as guardians of natural resources in a community or region. This means that their voices and knowledge are not noticed or documented in the research process. However, the related research data or information will not be complete if Indigenous women are not interviewed and/or consulted as a part of the research process for many aspects of climate research.

Applying an “intersectional gender lens” involves looking at how multiple key aspects of identity interact with gender to produce disadvantage and marginalization, as well as advantage and privilege. Central to this perspective is understanding “how different oppressions work to exacerbate or alter the experience of one another” (Farhall and Rickards 2021, 4). These interactions influence the differing needs and perspectives of diverse groups of women, men, persons with disability, Indigenous peoples and other minority and often marginalized groups. This, in turn, further limits their ability to engage meaningfully in research and to benefit from it and to have relevant risks identified.

Using an intersectional gender approach requires balancing social, economic and gender aspects in the research process. This does not mean that use of an intersectional gender lens become the front and center of all research but rather that this approach is applied and integrated as one essential component of the research process, findings and analysis. A key part of this integrated intersectional approach to research is to ensure that research questions and processes include data collection that allow researchers to analyze the differential impact of any proposed actions or research explorations on diverse male and female population groups and to take this differential impact and set of experiences into account in the drafting of any recommendations stemming from the research.

Currently there also tends to be an imbalance between mainstream and well-established research organizations and civil society organizations (CSOs) as the former often have more power and research credibility compared with the CSOs, particularly those that represent diverse groups of women and persons with disabilities. This may result in these organizations often being asked to serve solely as data collectors but being excluded as research leaders and from the research analysis and reporting process.

Use of intersectional gender analysis also introduces methodologies that can empower the research subjects and participants. Intersectional and gender-responsive research methodology is usually more participatory in nature and can contribute greatly to empowering people, notably women or other more traditionally excluded groups. It also helps both men and women affected by a specific problem to analyze an issue, understand its causes, and find solutions that can lead to positive change for both. Given their often different roles related to climate change adaptation and mitigation, the related solutions are also often different for women and men.

## **What does applying an integrated gender and intersectional lens in research require?**

Integrating an intersectional gender lens in research requires that researchers take intersectional gender issues into consideration in the overall research agenda and process. It means gender and intersectional dimensions are integrated into every research component:

- i) identifying the problem; defining the conceptual and analytical framework;
- ii) choosing the methodology;
- iii) analyzing the findings; and
- iv) disseminating the results.

Integrating gender and intersectionality approaches in research does not change the scope or subject of the research; rather it provides new perspectives, raises new questions, and uses new analysis tools to create a more complete picture of the problem. At the end, the integration of intersectional gender approaches into the research process leads to a better understanding of the problems and higher quality and more rigorous research. As men and women intersect with diverse social entities (including minority groups), have different roles and different power, their perspectives on a problem can be quite different. By combining their different experiences and viewpoints and giving equal value to each, researchers can enhance the comprehension of a problem. This, in turn, makes it possible to develop more inclusive and effective recommendations

Using gender and intersectionality approaches in the research also involves striving to provide equal opportunities both women and men across class, gender, geography, ability, and other minority groups to participate actively in the research. This can be as researchers, data collectors, in the data analysis process, research report drafting, and as presenters of the research results.

## Different approaches to integrating intersectional gender lenses in research

The extent to which a research proposal and process integrates an intersectional gender analysis and process will differ from research project to research project. You can use the five integration categories below to determine to what degree your research proposal has or will integrate an intersectional gender analysis.

***Gender-transformative research:*** The research project will contribute to a deeper understanding of intersectional gender inequality. It has the potential to improve the lives of large numbers of diverse or specific groups of women, and relations between women and men, through significant policy influence and related actions nationally, regionally or globally.

***Gender-focused research:*** The research project includes an intersectional gender analysis or outlines a process for conducting an intersectional gender analysis that includes an examination of: socially constructed relations between different categories of women and men, relations of power, differential access to and control over resources and benefits, etc. within the context of the project's overall research questions.

***Women-specific research:*** The research project focuses on 'women' but does not show evidence of a detailed analysis of gender relations, including power relations, between different categories of women and men. Women are designated as the focus (participants, beneficiaries, target group) of the project.

***Women-inclusive research:*** Diverse groups of women are included as one of the target groups (beneficiaries or participants in the project) and the research project includes an intersectional gender analysis.

***Women-incidental research project:*** Diverse groups of women are incidental to the project. Women may be mentioned in passing but there is no analysis of women as a target group.<sup>1</sup>

All can be valid depending upon what your research question is. However, if you elect to submit a proposal that would be classified as "Women-Incidental" you will need to provide a rationale and justification for not including any groups of women as a target group.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted and updated from: Navsharan Singh, March 1999. Thinking Gender in Development Research: A Review of IDRC Funded Projects 1996-1997 from a Gender Perspective Link: <http://idrinfo.idrc.ca/archive/corpdocs/112826/112826.pdf>

## How to integrate an intersectional gender approach into research

The steps you need to take to integrate an intersectional gender approach into your research proposal and process are outlined below. We note here that while we mention multiple demographic groups that you could include in your research process, part of the research development will be to determine which specific groups of women and men your research should include. It may not be possible or sometimes even relevant to include all the groups listed below. They do however, represent the demographic groups most often excluded from traditional research processes and as such, merit consideration before taking any decision not to include them in your specific research proposal.

In general, the steps you need to take are to:

1. Identify the problem. Has the research problem considered gender and intersectional issues? Does the research analysis provide sufficient insight into the gender and intersectionality elements of the proposed research topic (i.e., is it relevant)? For example, does it include data collection and analysis related to:
  - All relevant target groups affected by the problem identified (e.g., women, persons with disabilities, youth, Indigenous peoples, etc.);
  - An analysis of any related underlying root causes of exclusion based on gender or intersectional identities or economic class. This can include exclusion from access to information, resources, infrastructure, and providing inputs into any solutions suggested by the research. Underlying root causes of exclusion, discrimination or differential access to resources, representation and power can include negative social and gender norms, related attitudes and cultural practices, and discriminatory policies and institutions, women's lower income levels, etc.);
  - Access issues for the different male/female groups concerned – e.g., resources such as information and accessible communications; leadership, voice, freedom of movement, etc.
2. Define a conceptual framework that reflects how the situation and experiences of men and women in a particular context intersect with that of their other social identities such as ethnicity, age, formal/informal sector involvement, etc. There are many aspects to take into consideration in the conceptual framework to avoid an inadvertent male bias or a majorities or minorities bias, and to ensure use of an inclusive intersectional gender-responsive approach.
3. Apply and include an intersectional gender lens as a part of the formulation of the research questions: e.g., how are women and men, person with disabilities, youth, Indigenous peoples, and other minorities currently affected by the issue and what roles does each specific group considered in the research process play in problem and solutions to be identified?
4. Use inclusive definitions of concepts; avoid male bias, prejudices and generalizations. If women and men have different experiences related to the field of research, it is likely that they also have different conceptual definitions or understanding of the research problem.

Gender-sensitive research thus, should pay attention to and integrate different perspectives when defining concepts. It can be useful to try to identify if female and male scientists give the same definition and use the same conceptual framework. Including publications by both male and female scientists in the review of literature could be useful for this purpose.

5. Develop an intersectional gender-sensitive methodology. Questioning the conventional approach to research is an important part of this process. The usual hierarchical position of researchers that maintain a distance from research subjects has been criticized in recent years, because it often ignores a wide range of local knowledge and raises ethical issues about who is benefiting from the research results, and how and for what purpose the research results are used. An intersectional gender-sensitive methodology not only takes into account gender differences in the conceptual and analytical framework, it also uses methods and tools that are participatory, respectful, and accountable.
6. Use qualitative tools to capture people's perspectives and diversity of viewpoints. Quantitative tools are useful for identifying 'what' and 'how many', qualitative tools are interesting and needed because they help us to understand 'how' and 'why'. They give a voice to people, even for issues that seem very technical, recognizing that both men and women from any socio-economic background have valuable experiences and knowledge.
7. Set up your methodology to ensure that the intersectional gender analysis is tailored to the specific research topic, sector and sub-sector and highlights unique barriers and opportunities for women, persons with disabilities and other marginalised groups.
8. Work to ensure that the project research team reflects the research participants' identities as much as possible within the context. Ask is your team diverse enough? Do you have mixed research team with a balanced or fair representation of women and men, persons with disabilities, Indigenous people and other minority groups including in the leadership of the research team? Are there equal opportunities for the diverse research team members to engage in the research design, research data gathering, data analysis, reporting and presentation of research results? Are working conditions in research project shaped in the way that accommodate equal and fairly the special need of the researchers such as women with disabilities or other special needs (if applicable)?
9. Consider the comprehensive ethical framework governing information collection and analysis, emphasizing the importance of understanding who (from which demographic groups) is collecting the data. This consideration is pivotal, influencing the information's quality, authenticity, and value. Simultaneously, ensure equitable representation of women in the sample population studied. Address ethical considerations related to data privacy and security by providing clear guidelines for protecting sensitive information, obtaining informed consent, and anonymizing data to safeguard the confidentiality of participants. Additionally, discuss ethical practices for sharing research data, striking a balance between the advantages of open access and the imperative to protect the rights and privacy of individuals and communities.
10. Use intersectional gender-sensitive research tools. It is important to use research's tools that are not seen as threatening or embarrassing for women, men or for minority groups. It can be very challenging for some women to talk about some issues in front of men from their



family or community, or men from outside. Some locations or times selected for people to take part in the research may be convenient for men, but not for women or minority groups (or vice versa). There thus, needs to be a variety of interview/focus group times set in different locations to ensure that no one group is excluded. In addition, use of written materials is not appropriate when working with illiterate or people with low education levels. In some contexts, women have very few opportunities to express their ideas; consequently, their knowledge and opinions are often neglected, even by themselves. They may not be used to talking in public or to being consulted. Thus, it is important to show interest in their roles and views, to value their experiences, and to have patience. Even if women and men have different roles and experiences, it is important to give both the opportunity to present their points of view on the same subject and pay attention to the similarities and the differences.

11. Take an intersectional gender perspective into account in the analysis and interpretation of the data collected. Collect, use and produce gender-disaggregated data and conduct an explicit intersectional gender analysis as a part of your analysis process. As a part of this refer back to what are the underlying causes of any differences found among the different groups who have participated in the research. It is important to both document any differences based on gender and socio-economic differences found and why there are such differences, inequities, or inequalities. An intersectional gender analysis should explain the differences in experiences, viewpoints, and impacts related to gender roles and power relations in the research context.
12. In presenting research findings, it is crucial to underscore the gender dimension of the research topic, ensuring visibility of gender differences in roles, involvements, experiences, opinions, and needs. The report should not only acknowledge but actively highlight the diverse contributions and experiences of women and men across various social identities. Employing language that is sensitive to gender and intersectionality within the research report is a potent strategy, recognizing that language itself is not inherently gender-neutral and often reflects underlying gender norms and biases ingrained in most cultures. Moreover, to maximize the impact of the research, it is advisable to encourage the development of plain language summaries of the findings. These summaries can be shared with a broad spectrum of audiences, including policymakers, practitioners, and community members, fostering accessibility and understanding. Additionally, exploring the use of multimedia formats such as videos, infographics, and podcasts in communicating research findings becomes imperative. Such diverse formats enhance accessibility and engagement across different demographics, contributing to a more comprehensive and inclusive dissemination of the research outcomes.

## References

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## About FINCAPES

The Flood Impacts, Carbon Pricing, and Ecosystem Sustainability (FINCAPES) project is a collaborative, gender-responsive initiative funded by Global Affairs Canada. Over a 5.5-year period, jointly undertaken by the University of Waterloo's Faculty of Mathematics and Faculty of Environment, the project supports Indonesia in adapting to climate change, mitigating its impacts, and conserving biodiversity in a socially and economically sustainable manner. Aligned with Indonesia's priorities, FINCAPES enhances the nation's capacity in key areas: forecasting and mitigating financial impacts of climate-change-induced floods, promoting Nature-based Solutions for peatland and mangrove restoration, and strengthening climate finance policy frameworks with a focus on carbon financing mechanisms.

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