

‘Top 10’ GEI priorities for AI4D partners

Priority actions for the IDRC’s Artificial Intelligence for Development in Africa (AI4D) partners to support & hold grantees accountable to gender-responsive AI research & innovation

Learning Brief No. 1 • Alex Berryhill and Lorena Fuentes (Ladysmith) • March 2022

Objective of this resource: To summarize priority actions for integrating gender equality and inclusion (GEI) considerations in the early stages of grantee selection and engagement. This checklist should be seen as the minimum ‘essentials’ for gender-responsive AI research and innovation projects (see our definition of gender-responsive research in the [Annex](#) below). We encourage you to review the curated resources included in this document, reach out to your Program Officer, Gender Support Lead, local GEI experts, and human rights activists from impacted communities in order to move beyond these minimum ‘essentials’ for more gender-transformative research and program impact.

This is the first resource in the **AI4D GEI Support Team’s learning brief series:**

- [Learning Brief No. 2](#) provides an operational definition of gender-responsive projects in the context of AI-driven research and innovation, and synthesizes available research that illustrates why GEI considerations matter for the design and use of algorithmic decision-making.
- [Learning Brief No. 3](#) in continuation of Learning Brief No. 2 (this resource), identifies key action areas for advancing gender-responsive AI research and innovation.

Stage 1: Designing a call for proposal

1. **Review the select list of [key terms](#) below, [Technical Brief #1: Designing gender-responsive data projects](#), and [IDRC’s Equality Statement](#).** Does your review team share a common understanding of these concepts and terms? If not, create space to discuss with your review team. Use this discussion as an opportunity to build team commitment to GEI integration.
2. **Include a local GEI expert both in the design of your call for proposals, and in your proposal review team.** This could include a local researcher, or a representative from a local gender equality or women’s rights organization. Ensure their equitable participation in decision-making.
3. **Consult local stakeholders on *how* to provide marginalized communities with equitable access to participate in the call for proposal.** What steps can be taken to allow underrepresented groups or untraditional academic teams access your call for proposals? Local stakeholders might include

human rights activists from impacted communities, or representatives from local gender equality and women's rights organizations. Ensure stakeholders have ample time to meaningfully contribute to the design and dissemination of proposals.

Stage 2: Questions to include in your call for proposals and review process

4. **Does the proposal illustrate a strong understanding of gender and identity?** Does the proposal illustrate an understanding of how different social groups relate in their local context, including inequalities within and among such groups? Does the proposal illustrate an understanding of how the proposed research or innovation will impact or address these relationships? (Keeping in mind potential unintended impacts as well.)
5. **Does the proposal clearly outline how their research will contribute to positive outcomes for gender equality and inclusion, such as more equitable decision-making?** Is this theory of change clear throughout their proposed project design?
6. **Which communities and perspectives are represented in the project's team? Which are excluded?** Consider both team leadership, as well as identified local partners. How are impacted communities engaged in the project's design (including plans for data collection, analysis and use)? How does the project's design enable diverse perspectives to participate and influence the project's decision-making processes?
7. **How are risks or potential negative unintended consequences being monitored and mitigated?** How are impacted communities engaged in the project's monitoring and risk mitigation plan?
*Recommendation: Request that all proposals include a participatory monitoring and evaluation plan,¹ and/or provide capacity-building to support participatory monitoring and evaluation.

Stage 3: Setting grantees up for success

8. **Share resources on gender-transformative research.** This might include, for example, the resources shared below, as well as instructions on how to consult your hub's GEI expert.
9. **Monitor how grantees implement their originally proposed plan for GEI integration, at least on a quarterly basis.** Any protection risks that were originally identified in their proposal should be regularly assessed as well. Consider problem-solving with grantees on GEI issues in your regular support to avoid any potential harms and enhance practice.
10. **Create space for your grantees to adjust or re-negotiate timelines in order to respond to changing contexts, if needed.** Gender-responsive projects are sensitive to local, changing contexts; adjust

¹ For guidance on participatory M&E methods, see [Bondi et al \(2021\)](#); [Feinstein International Center \(2014\)](#); and [Frontline Aids \(2006\)](#).



project plans when protection risks are identified; and engage with stakeholders from impacted communities in order to connect their research to action. However, these characteristics require flexibility and trust from project funders. Therefore, in order to support gender-responsive AI, ensure your grantees are aware that you are open to re-negotiating timelines and/or reporting requirements as needed, if and when it supports their efforts to more effectively integrate GEI.



ANNEX:

IDRC's Research project gender markers:

Gender-blind or limited	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the start, the project has a treatment of gender that could potentially cause harm (blind) or adversely affect outcomes (limited).
Gender aware	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gender is considered in the research project's rationale, but is not an operative concept in the design and methodology
Gender sensitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the start, the project has a fitting gender lens. Awareness of intersectional issues, root causes in program areas of research or field. By the end of the project, there is a minimal indication of a gender lens.
Gender responsive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the start, the project is clear about gendered outcomes in the rationale for issues and targeting. Gendered (intersectional) relations are considered and built-in to call/concept note, grant contract, proposal and/or evaluation grids (pre and post). By the end of the project, in addition to the previous marker, the project has addressed gendered intersectional relations in the research. This may include, depending on the intervention, sex-disaggregated (and other relevant intersections) instruments, data collection and meaningful participation of targeted marginalized groups. There have been gender considerations related to legitimacy (team composition and gender expertise) and support for capacities in gender and relevant analyses. Results of gender analysis are used to inform implementation strategies and influence outreach, communication and policy strategies.
Gender transformative	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At the start, in addition to the previous term, the project aims to address the root causes of gender inequality and underlying power dynamics and norms that perpetuate gender inequalities relevant to the research. By the end of the project, in addition to the previous marker, there is evidence of gendered outcomes achieved or well-positioned to be achieved. Gender was well-considered throughout the research cycle including legitimacy (team composition and broader governance including advisors, links to gender experts) and positioning for use (forms of meaningful engagement, dissemination, forums, networking, authorship, co-authorship, knowledge translation). As part of addressing underlying dynamics and root causes, the project has led to changes in social norms and social relations and gendered power dynamics at different levels. How that is done will vary depending on research and intervention but there is related evidence of change or progress towards change.

Key terms:

- **Gender:** Gender refers to the socially-constructed roles, responsibilities and relationships that society considers appropriate for women and men. It also has implications therefore for individuals and groups who identify as gender non-conforming. Gender is upheld by political, economic, social, and cultural institutions. Gender is context and time-specific, and thus changeable as well.
- **Sex:** The sum of biological and physiological characteristics that typically define men and women, such as reproductive organs, hormonal make-up, chromosomal patterns, hair-growth patterns, distribution of muscle and fat, body shape and skeletal structure.
- **Intersectionality:** The cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of oppression, discrimination and exclusion (including but not limited to racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect.
- **Inclusion:** The aim of inclusion is to embrace all people irrespective of race, gender, disability, medical or other need. It is about giving equal access and opportunities and getting rid of discrimination and intolerance (removal of barriers). It affects all aspects of public life.

Additional resources:

- Technical Brief 1: Designing gender-responsive data projects ([Ladysmith 2021](#))
- Technical Brief 2: A guide for more gender-responsive health research ([Ladysmith 2021](#))
- Technical Brief 3: Stakeholder engagement for gender-responsive health research ([Ladysmith 2021](#))
- Transforming gender relations: Insights from IDRC research ([IDRC 2019](#)).
- Seven intersectional feminist principles for equitable and actionable COVID-19 data ([D'Ignazio and Klein 2020](#))
- Ethical funding for trustworthy AI: proposals to address the responsibilities of funders to ensure that projects adhere to trustworthy AI practice ([Gardner et al 2021](#))
- Gender transformative approaches ([CGIAR](#))
- The potential and unknowns of gender transformative approaches ([IFAD 2021](#))

For more resources, we recommend visiting [this Google Drive folder](#) organized by IDRC, along with the [AI4D program website](#). IDRC and the AI4D gender support team will continue adding publicly available resources to both of these pages throughout the AI4D program.