

The Status of Gender Research in A4NH-affiliated Centers: Challenges, Opportunities, and the Role of A4NH

In May 2014, a portfolio review was completed to assess the status of gender in A4NH research. The portfolio review assessed 64 A4NH-affiliated projects in the 2012 and 2013 work plans¹. Given the gender research strength in IFPRI, we targeted additional in-depth interviews with 16 representatives in 6 of the A4NH participating centers². This gender portfolio review reveals challenges as well as opportunities.

A. Current gender practices in A4NH research

1. Frequent collection of gender disaggregated data

Collecting gender disaggregated data was the most common way of researching gender, with around three quarters of the respondents. Gender disaggregated data is commonly collected for baselines on assets, crops, production, labor, income, consumption, nutrient intake, health seeking behavior, or attitudes and preferences. Many surveys capture some gender data in a subsection of the questionnaire.

2. Consideration of gender roles, norms, preferences, and differences

Most centers have already started thinking about gender in many projects, acknowledging the importance of considering gender norms and intra-household gender relations, but implementing these perspectives can be constrained by lack of capacity, resources, and uncertainty over the appropriate tools and methods.

3. Non-systematic analysis of gender data and results

Gender is less often *driving* research questions than it is *complementing* or contextualizing them. When gender results are produced and/or gender disaggregated data is collected, researchers sometimes struggle to interpret, analyze, and “make use” of the data, citing lack of guidance from their center or the CRP.

“An unresolved issue is how to make use of the gender related research results, since neither the CRPs nor Bioversity have made this clear. Even if projects research gender, this is embedded in other research activities... Bioversity reports on gender disaggregated data, but it could improve. Some gender data is even completely neglected during the analysis phase.”

“Data analysis is deemed a particularly weak point since analyzing the gender data is not always prioritized, especially not from surveys.”

4. Limited gender-sensitive M&E

Most centers have limited gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation. Less than a quarter of centers reported to be implementing gender M&E, though this may be shifting with the

¹ A4NH-affiliated center work plans for 2012 and 2013 can be found following this [link](#).

² Interviews were conducted with respondents at IITA, Bioversity, ICRAF, ILRI, ICRISAT, and IFPRI (Harvest Plus, PHND, MTID). Researchers at A4NH partner AVRDC were also interviewed.

inclusion of gender in donor requirements. Centers noted the need for gender indicators to guide how projects should be monitored on gender.

“To move beyond rhetoric, the need to introduce gender indicators was noted since this will make gender analysis less abstract and more manageable when people know what data to collect.”

“It was noted that it is important to insist that centers systematically report and follow up on the specific gender activities in their projects since this will encourage project leaders to support gender research throughout the implementation phase.”

5. Frequent research focus on women and nutrition

Women of reproductive age and children are often the subjects of A4NH research, which may facilitate the perception that gender is sufficiently addressed by default and preclude any efforts for deeper examination, consideration of new methods, or mainstreaming gender in other projects.

B. Constraints to gender research

1. Varying levels of staffing and capacity across centers

Experiences of the centers are quite diverse, ranging from those who felt that gender was only treated as an add-on to existing projects to those where a significant proportion of staff had received gender training, but still felt constrained because social science research capacity is overstretched. Despite this, there is a growing consensus among centers that gender needs to be addressed in the research program (*“not just how to do it, but how to do it the best way”*).

“...even if gender is on the ...research agenda – the livelihoods, gender and impact program has the specific mission to mainstream gender at institutional, program and project levels – and many researchers understand the value of gender research, their competence might be limited to thinking of including women and to collect gender disaggregated data rather than engage in gender analyses and assessments. This was traced to the fact that the majority of the researchers are biomedical scientists, veterinarians or livestock experts, with few social scientists.”

Some centers have attempted to augment their own gender capacity by working with partners who may be able to bring gender experts on board. One center specifically identified lack of gender-related M&E capacity as a problem, possibly because it works with development projects for which M&E skills may be important. Another center complements its in-house gender research capacity by hiring consultants according to need, but gender research capacity is still limited, reflecting the overall limited social science research capacity within the center as well as the limited interaction between the biophysical scientists and the social scientists.

2. Negotiating for scarce resources

Resources, of course, are an important issue, with centers underscoring the importance of designating specific resources for gender. Negotiating for gender is often necessary, and in the

absence of designated resources, a strong justification must be made for the instrumental and intrinsic value addressing gender has for the project.

“There is no specific funding for gender research per se, which was noted to translate into a time allocation problem as well as a challenge vis-à-vis donors that want them to account for their gender research.”

“It was noted that when the gender focal points (GFPs) have enough resources, they can be flexible and creative in their research and the methods they use in relation to gender analysis. But since resources are always limited, the GFPs have to negotiate with the PIs if gender is going to be a focus area. In relation to this, some PIs are more responsive than others. It was noted that the center currently collects gender disaggregated data more or less on a regular basis, but to move beyond that there is need for specific resources, and those are not always available.”

“...the need for support to effectively integrate gender research in their projects was identified as even more urgent. Depending on available funds, it was noted that it would be good if researchers could apply for seed money to support gender research, since they already have people that are trained. One way to ensure that gender is researched in a satisfactory way in these projects would be to allocate funds for people to implement specific gender components. If there is no designated budget, gender issues easily fall off the radar, with continued business as usual.”

3. Perception of gender as an “add on”, rather than integral to research

Another issue is that gender is often viewed as an add-on to ongoing research projects, rather than integral to the development of the research from the beginning.

“The challenge so far is that the few gender experts [in our center] are often used as service providers and not asked to intervene at the initial priority settings and project formulation stage but at a later stage, which often makes gender an add-on to the ‘real’ research carried out by the projects.”

4. Monitoring and reporting on gender research and connecting with A4NH

At present, details on aspects of gender research are poorly captured in the work plans required by A4NH, making it likely for gender research to actually be under-reported and probably not understood with great nuance by people external to the center. Gender questions were added to the 2013 work plans and refined for the 2014 work plan, aiming to capture as best as possible actual activities and practices rather than aspirations.

Many A4NH researchers in participating Centers would like to align their efforts with the overall A4NH Gender Strategy and expressed interest in better understanding its goals, component-specific objectives, and research questions. Most of the centers pointed out that they need advice on how to work with gender in a better way and that it would be helpful if A4NH could facilitate linkages to gender experts elsewhere and to connect the different A4NH projects so that they can share experiences.

C. From problems to opportunities: What is the role of A4NH?

The following table presents challenges, possible solutions, and opportunities. The gender inventory also identified some needs expressed by gender focal points within participating centers. Some of these needs are specific to A4NH; others are more general and are relevant to strengthening gender research at the centers. An action plan for A4NH-specific needs is provided in the last column.

	Challenge	Possible solutions	Opportunities	Suggestions from gender inventory	A4NH Action Plan
1.	Limited information on how and to what extent gender is addressed in projects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve the flow of information between A4NH and centers, drawing upon available technical advising and resources, and refining reporting process/indicators 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a simple way for Centers to self-assess their gender research performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Require that each A4NH project submit an abstract together with their work plans Gender Marker tool* Most Significant Change technique* 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Piloted a new template with gender questions in Work Plan 2014 so that centers can share their work on gender in research questions, methods, data, and themes
2.	Limited capacity of gender researchers in centers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with partners who have gender research capacity; build up capacity of gender researchers in centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for gender training related to agriculture, health, and nutrition Build a community of practice where people can draw on others working in this area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to reach out to staff in general, not just A4NH focal points 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to provide gender training and build a community of practice through the annual cross-CRP gender-nutrition workshop and GNIE blog
3.	Capacity exists, but overstretched	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hire more gender researchers, train other scientists in gender research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link up CG researchers with partners who can provide this expertise, possibly by developing a database of partners/consultants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop databases with resource persons – one with gender experts for technical backstopping and one with national nutritionists for potential partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Submitted 3 applications for CO gender postdocs in partnership with other CRPs Develop a database of gender and nutrition experts

	Challenge	Possible solutions	Opportunities	Suggestions from gender inventory	A4NH Action Plan
4.	Lack of gender M&E capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with consultants who have gender M&E capacity • Build up gender M&E capacity in centers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop specific training modules or events around gender-related M&E 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train project gender teams in gender research and analysis (instead of training of trainers only). Project gender focal points may also need further trainings as well as learn how to use software packages for data analysis. • Access to an expert database for short consultation needs as strategies are developed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address gender-related M&E methods and issues in the annual gender-nutrition workshop and GNIE blog • Develop a database of gender and nutrition experts
5.	No specific funding for gender research in research projects; gender gets “added on” as an afterthought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help centers designate budget for gender 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many donors now require attention to gender in grant proposals. Assist centers in addressing this in a meaningful way. Add ons, if strategically formulated, can have high value for money in increasing attention to gender (example of GAAP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer complementary funding that researchers can apply for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordinate technical assistance in formulating gender research questions and analysis plans in grant proposals.

*More information on the Gender Marker tool and the Most Significant Change technique is available upon request.