BRIEF

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The Gender Equality in Research Scale

A tool for monitoring and encouraging progress on gender integration in research for and in development.

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In 2011, the first system-wide CGIAR gender strategy was launched to strengthen the CGIAR research agenda and its impact on development challenges. In line with global development agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals at the time (and the current Sustainable Development Goals), the strategy recognized that gender inequality hinders progress toward the outcomes CGIAR seeks to achieve: poverty reduction, food security, improved nutrition and health, and environmental integrity (CGIAR Consortium Board 2011). Moreover, it highlighted the need for gender integration in research to increase research quality. As the European Commission (EC) (2009) has stated, "excellent research is gender-sensitive". Gender-sensitive research improves research quality and validity as it is more representative, and it is more relevant as it can "reach a broader group of end-users in a more relevant way" (EC 2009). On the tails of the CGIAR gender strategy, the CGIAR research programs (CRPs) were tasked with developing their own strategies to ensure rigorous integration of gender issues in the research they conducted. Within that context, discussions began on how to best monitor and evaluate progress in this integration process.

This brief discusses a monitoring and learning tool – the Gender Equality in Research Scale (GEIRS) – designed to assess the level of gender integration across a CRP's research portfolio and at different stages of the research and development cycle (Box 1).

Since 2013, all CRPs have been expected to provide a self-assessment of their gender mainstreaming status in their annual reports based on two indicators: the existence of 1) gender equality baselines and targets and 2) an institutional architecture for gender mainstreaming. These indicators, however, do not provide much insight into the issues research teams face when attempting to identify and address gender dimensions at the project level – insights that are also crucial for teams dedicated to providing support for gender integration. To address this gap, the GEIRS was developed by the CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA) gender coordination team (GCT)[1] in collaboration with the FTA Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessment (MELIA) team and Cultural Practice, LLC, an external consulting firm with recognized expertise on gender mainstreaming in international development.

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[1] The GCT ensures the implementation of FTA's gender strategy and leads gender integration efforts across the program.

Box 1. What is the GEIRS?

The Gender Equality in Research Scale (GEIRS) is a monitoring and learning tool designed to monitor the level of gender integration in FTA's research portfolio through a self-assessment questionnaire based on a set of minimum standards for gender integration. The self-assessment is carried out by project leaders or teams on an annual basis and reflects the stage the project is in at the time of assessment. It allows both research teams and the GCT to identify strategies for achieving higher levels of gender integration and amplifying prospects for more equitable, relevant and sustainable outcomes.

The GEIRS addresses one of the two components of the monitoring and evaluation plan for gender responsiveness in the CRP, namely gender integration in the research and development cycle. The second component of the monitoring and evaluation plan looks at the contribution of both gender-integrated and gender-specific research to transformative outcomes on equity and inclusion. This aspect is addressed in collaboration with the FTA Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessment (MELIA) team by conducting impact studies on selected projects.

Developing the GEIRS

As both the CGIAR and FTA gender strategies recognize that gender integration should happen at every stage of the research and development cycle, the GEIRS was developed around four stages of the cycle that are common to all research projects in the CRP portfolio. These are priority setting, research design, implementation and monitoring, and communication of outputs. The tool proposes a series of questions related to minimum standards of gender integration at each particular stage.

Determining and fine-tuning these minimum standards was the most challenging part of developing the GEIRS. They draw from international best practice in terms of monitoring and evaluation of gender integration, including from organizations such as FAO, IFAD, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, UN, the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom and The World Bank; they are also informed by internal CGIAR documents, including the FTA gender strategy and other CRP strategies, as well as by tools and guidelines for integrating gender into research and development.

A guiding principle for developing the GEIRS was for the tool to go beyond the current CGIAR definitions of gender-integrated research, which focus heavily on the collection of sex-disaggregated data. While the GEIRS generates data on project-level collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data (which can easily be aggregated to the CRP level), this information alone is insufficient for assessing whether projects are likely to contribute toward the targets formulated in the CGIAR's Intermediate Development Outcome (IDO)[2] on equity and inclusion. The formulation of the GEIRS criteria is thus guided by a more comprehensive theory of change, identifying critical gender considerations from the onset of the research process all the way to dissemination and monitoring of results.

The GEIRS standards are focused on how the research is designed and implemented as well as on the diversity of stakeholders involved at various stages of the project. The tool tries to establish whether gender issues pertaining to the project's topic of study are addressed in the research methodology. As mentioned above, the tool also inquires about the collection of sex-disaggregated data, but more importantly about the use of such data to inform or explain the gender relations, norms and roles that could influence project outcomes. The GEIRS is careful not to be too prescriptive; it does not, for example, specify the kinds of partnerships that should be built or the kinds of research methods that should be used, as it would be impossible to anticipate all the relevant approaches and methods for different projects in the CRP.

Understanding the GEIRS

Recognizing that gender issues might not be relevant to some research projects, the tool was designed to allow the identification of such projects and exclude them from

[2] The CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework 2016-2030 (CGIAR Consortium Office 2015) defines equitable access to resources, information and power in the agri-food system for men and women as one of its goals and defines three related sub-IDOs: 1) gender-equitable control of productive resources and assets; 2) technologies that reduce women's labor and energy expenditure developed and disseminated; 3) improved capacity of women and young people to participate in decision making.

the gender integration assessment. To that end, the first stage of the GEIRS aims to classify the research project in one of three categories:

- *Gender specific:* Research in which gender and gender relations are the main topic of the analysis. This type of research deepens understanding of how gender relations and inequalities affect agricultural innovation, productivity and sustainability as well as management and use of forests and forest products.
- *Gender relevant:* Research that does not have gender as a primary theme of study, but where social variables, including gender, are relevant in shaping outcomes in terms of human well-being, environmental conservation and equity. This type of research should integrate gender considerations into all stages of the research cycle.
- *Not gender relevant:* Research projects that do not involve human participants, are not field based or that focus exclusively on the development of methods, theories or technologies to improve the biophysical research process in a laboratory setting.

All projects considered *gender specific or gender relevant* will go through a second stage of assessment that looks at the extent to which they have integrated gender at different stages of the research cycle. The assessment comprises 11 questions, where those that receive a positive response (supported by evidence when required) and are applicable will add points to the final score. The total score is calculated as a percentage based on the total number of points from applicable questions, providing an indication of the extent to which the research project has met – or is on course to meet – minimum standards for gender integration. The maximum score (100%) reflects full adherence to the GEIRS minimum standards for gender integration. The higher the score, the more *gender sensitive* the project is considered to be.

- *Gender sensitive:* Gender-relevant research that recognizes the potentially different priorities and needs of men and women related to their socially constructed roles and interests in managing and using forests and forest products, and that takes these into account across the project cycle (Box 2).

Box 2. The GEIRS minimum standards for gender integration in gender-relevant research across four stages of research in the development cycle

Priority setting	Research design	Implementation and monitoring	Communication of outputs
• Project consults with both women and men beneficiaries, local organizations or other relevant stakeholders with an interest in and responsibility for supporting gender-equitable policies and programming to identify key gender considerations in setting research priorities and goals.	• Project carries out a socioeconomic background review (through review of literature or field-based data collection) to identify potential gender concerns related to the research topic. • Potential gender differences in needs and interests, and inequalities or gaps in participation and benefits, are addressed in the research design. • Research team has gender expertise or capacity.	• Project collects data from men and women, and disaggregates it by sex and other relevant social categories (e.g. ethnicity, age, religion). • Project analyzes sex-disaggregated data to explain potential gender variations and inequalities. • Project develops indicators and monitors how men and women participate in and benefit from the research project.	• Project shares results with gender equality advocates, policy makers, and men and women who participated in or are affected by the research findings. • Gender-relevant findings inform and are included in relevant project outputs and communication products.

The first version of the GEIRS was designed as an online questionnaire using the SurveyMonkey platform. The tool was later incorporated as a module in the FTA project database along with modules on budget, outcomes, and monitoring and evaluation, among others. Discussions are ongoing to make it a module available in the Managing Agricultural Research for Learning and Outcomes platform (the information management system adopted by 10 CRPs) for other programs to benefit.

Piloting and adapting the GEIRS

A draft of the GEIRS was piloted in 2015 to test its utility, accessibility and validity for measuring gender integration. A sample of nine researchers from four participating FTA institutions were asked to apply GEIRS to assess their projects and provide written feedback on their experience using the tool. An external consultant was also tasked with reviewing project documents to test the fit between the researchers' self-assessments and the reported objectives, methodology, outputs and outcomes of the projects. A comparison of the two assessments produced insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the tool and led to a revised version that was subsequently rolled out for the whole FTA project portfolio.

The questionnaire-based assessment was disseminated to all active grant managers via email from their respective center gender coordinators. These emails were followed up with a reminder from the FTA Director, which helped increase the response rate substantially. The final response rate calculated against all active FTA projects at that time was around 40%.

The results were analyzed, both internally and by the same external consultant who supported the pilot. The analysis included an in-depth review of documentation from a sample of assessed projects. This analysis helped to fine-tune the tool, the criteria and the presentation of assessment results.

Interpreting the GEIRS results

Of the 52 projects that self-selected to undertake the assessment, 2 were rated gender specific, 44 gender relevant and 6 not gender relevant. However, after reviewing project documents and descriptions provided in the self-assessments, the GCT deemed that only two projects (and certain components of a third) fit the criteria for not gender-relevant projects. To mitigate misunderstandings at the gender-relevance assessment stage, an open box was thus added to ask research leaders to provide a justification when checking the "not gender relevant" box.

Of the 44 projects identified as gender relevant, only 1 was assessed as gender sensitive across all 4 research and development phases (Figure 1). However, nearly 50% and 34% of the assessed projects scored themselves as gender sensitive at the priority setting and design phase, respectively. After a drastic drop to near zero during implementation and monitoring, the percentage increased to around 50% at the dissemination phase. Table 1 presents additional patterns on the gender sensitivity of projects based on the GEIRS results.

While it is difficult to assess the representativeness of our sample vis-à-vis the overall FTA portfolio, it is encouraging that gender being considered to some extent in the majority of the self-selected sample – in design, staffing, data collection and dissemination.

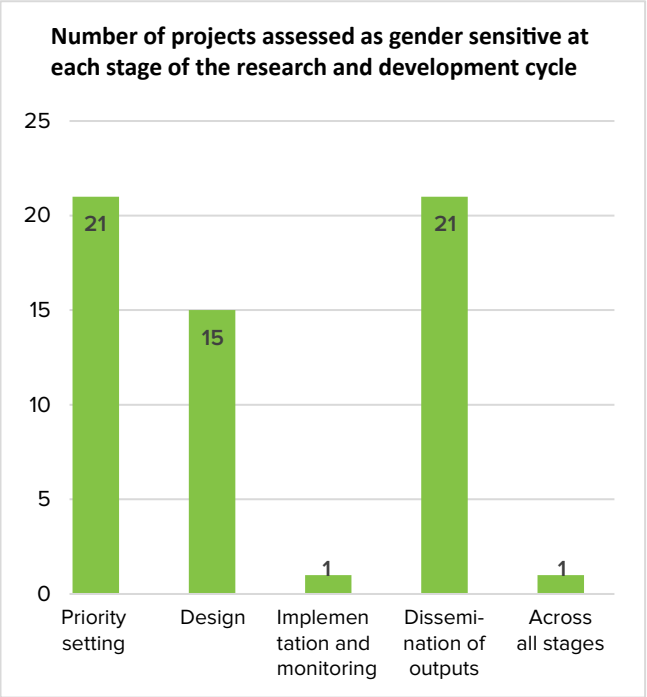

Figure 1. Gender sensitivity of projects across the project cycle, based on GEIRS scores

Table 1. Summary of the first round of GEIRS results

Priority setting	Design	Implementation and monitoring	Dissemination of outputs
• 29% consulted with women and men beneficiaries, or other relevant stakeholders, on priorities. • 57% consulted with them on goals and expected outcomes.	• 57% conducted background reviews to identify potential gender issues. • 36% did not address potential gender differences in there search design. • 59% of projects had gender expertise in the team.	• 31% did not collect any sex-disaggregated data (SDD), and 50% collected some data. • 38% did not analyze the SDD collected. • Only 25% had indicators to measure how both men and women benefit from the project. • 45% had indicators to measure participation.	• 75% shared research results with both men and women participants. • 52% shared results with advocates or policy makers interested in gender-relevant findings.

A man and woman harvest wheat in India.
Photo by World Agroforestry.

However, there is still a lot that needs to be done. Results indicate that while gender considerations are being addressed at early project stages, they tend to fade out in the implementation phase, when the biggest investment of time and resources is generally made. For instance, only 19% of projects disaggregated by sex *all* data for which people are the unit of analysis, but around half of the projects report *some* of the data is disaggregated by sex. A possible explanation is that these data are collected within certain project components deemed more gender relevant than others. The fact that more than half of the projects did not analyze the sex-disaggregated data they had already collected also raises serious questions about the extent to which researchers actually consider gender relevant to their projects.

The results of the first round have also helped to critically revise the tool. For example, some of the questions in the first version were not entirely appropriate for higher-order comparative or meta-analysis projects, and, although such projects can report the nonapplicability of such questions, the tool might not be capturing other elements that make these kinds of projects gender responsive.

How can the GEIRS improve gender integration in research and development?

The key motivation for the GEIRS was to carve out standards and indicators for good gender mainstreaming practices across FTA and its participating institutions. Importantly, FTA now has a baseline against which to assess its own work and progress. The tool motivated some project leaders to 'do more' in the future as the GEIRS has now been integrated into the FTA monitoring and evaluation system and has become part of their reporting requirements.

The GEIRS data also generated useful information that could inform the work and priorities of the FTA GCT. For instance, while the case for collecting sex-disaggregated data still needs to be made, the GEIRS results signaled that greater emphasis on providing project-level support for analyzing those data is needed. It is also clear that FTA GCT needs to continue liaising with the FTA MELIA team to enhance the gender responsiveness of project indicators and monitoring of gender outcomes.

The GEIRS can reveal how well the CRP is doing with regards to gender mainstreaming, and it also provides research teams with information on their strengths and weaknesses in terms of gender integration at the project level. It additionally helps identify the areas, centers and flagships where support is most needed. This is a point of departure from approaches, such as the one adopted by CGIAR, that monitor progress only at an aggregate level using gender markers developed by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (see Wikigender 2015). These markers focus on identifying specific workstreams (associated with program milestones) that have a principal or significant gender objective, but do not offer insight into gender integration at the project level, where it usually takes shape more concretely. Finally, the GEIRS can provide evidence of the links between gender integration in research and the impacts of such research on gender equality outcomes.

Although the GEIRS alone is not a quality assurance mechanism, identifying a clear set of entry points for gender integration across the research cycle helps researchers think through the methods and strategies they apply and the stakeholders with whom they engage, and it encourages them to have capacity on their team to address relevant gender issues. It also helps the FTA GCT to better structure and focus its supporting function and capacity-building efforts as well as to identify areas of collaboration with other FTA support teams, such as the MELIA team and communications team.

Limitations of the GEIRS

As FTA projects vary immensely in terms of their scope, scale, methods, etc., the GEIRS alone is not – nor is it supposed to be – sufficient for assessing individual projects' performance in terms of gender integration.

Collens Mwinga, a farmer from Cameroon, smiles with his family. Photo by World Agroforestry.

The GEIRS is intended to prompt researchers to consider gender issues already at the priority setting and design phases, in the collection and analysis of data, and in the dissemination and monitoring of results. It does not, however, provide guidance on how gender issues should inform actions at different stages – nor would such a prescriptive approach be desirable or feasible, given the great variation among FTA projects. This aspect needs to be dealt with otherwise, in a tailor-made way, by the GCT and project implementers.

The GEIRS has been implemented in FTA as a self-selecting, online assessment process that could be completed by project managers at any stage of the research cycle. While this implementation strategy was chosen to 1) accommodate the dual learning and assessment functions and 2) allow for flexibility, it has seen limited uptake and raised some questions about the comparability of the data it will generate over time. Aligning the implementation of the GEIRS to fixed points along project cycles of each individual project could help mitigate this issue, while also increasing the potential that the GEIRS has to inform project design and implementation. However, this would risk adding to projects' administrative burden. There is also scope to further explore how the GEIRS can more effectively act as an entry point to dialogue about improved practice, e.g. by explicitly linking the questions raised by the GEIRS to available human and knowledge resources.

An additional limitation was that the tool did not support monitoring of progress on the budget allocated to gender research at the CRP level. CGIAR has provided guidance by defining and characterizing different types of gender studies (gender-integrated versus gender-specific research) for CRP gender budgeting and reporting (CGIAR Gender and Agriculture Research Network 2015). Although these guidelines informed the design of the GEIRS, it was challenging to apply systematic and sound criteria that would relate a certain level of gender integration with a relative budget share. Depending on the scope of the research and the methods applied, the cost for integrating gender considerations in research design and implementation can vary considerably and does not necessarily determine the rigor with which such integration is done.

Finally, being designed as a self-assessment, the GEIRS relies on the accuracy, transparency and openness of the information provided by project managers and their teams. Although the tool includes some provisions to identify misinterpretation of questions or dishonest answers, it is impractical to systematically validate the GEIRS self-assessment results. The document review carried out during the pilot and the first assessment round, which included mostly proposals and project reports, was very time-consuming. It also revealed that most researchers do not specifically report on gender integration activities if donors do not require it, even when gender issues are considered or addressed in the research process. Possibly, the only way to systematically ground truth the GEIRS results would be to interview a sample of respondents or conduct field visits to project sites.

Looking ahead

The implementation of the GEIRS and recommendations for its future use as a monitoring tool is being examined as part of an overarching review of gender integration in FTA. The review, conducted in collaboration with the FTA MELIA team, examines the extent and influence of FTA gender integration efforts during the first phase of the CRP, from 2011 to 2016. By examining the data that exist to inform conclusions on potential changes in gender integration and any factors that support this, the review will inform a proactive monitoring and learning system for the second phase of FTA, including the formulation of new research questions, monitoring tools and reporting processes. The review will recommend ways to enhance the learning potential of the GEIRS, both to individual researchers, participating FTA centers and the program as a whole, by streamlining it into center-level project management processes and standardizing the collection of data across the project cycle. For the data collected by the GEIRS to build a meaningful picture of performance over time and to understand whether and how gender integration is ultimately contributing to transformative change, the framework will need to be applied with greater consistency and followed up in evaluation designs and assessments.

The design of the tool follows defined stages of the research cycle in alignment with the CGIAR and FTA gender strategies. This model is increasingly changing toward a cogeneration of knowledge model that entails strong engagement with boundary partners and colearning as part and parcel of research projects. One of the tasks for teams working with the GEIRS will be to reflect on potentially missing elements that can help capture gender responsiveness in such research processes.

The GEIRS tool can be used not only to assess the gender responsiveness of projects, but also as a guide for the development of gender-responsive research and/in development projects. In that respect, it can make a valuable contribution to efforts to enhance the quality of research for development (QoR4D) in CGIAR and to strengthen the indicators currently proposed for assessing QoR4D across the system.

FTA will promote the uses of the GEIRS by other actors in the CGIAR system: The GEIRS has the potential to be integrated within different monitoring and evaluation systems at the CRP and center levels. The tool will continue to be adjusted and refined to better respond to the dynamic of the gender integration process and the diversity of research projects and impact pathways that constitute FTA. Other institutes and centers can be invited to adopt, adapt and help improve the tool for enhanced learning and monitoring of gender integration in research and development.

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RESEARCH PROGRAM ON Forests, Trees and Agroforestry

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