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Interview: A gear shift in addressing equality and inclusion

Katharine Vincent, SPARC Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Lead, shares the consortium's vision on fostering inclusivity and equality.

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[Katharine Vincent](#)

[Gender equality and social inclusion](#) Africa Middle East Global

• What is the SPARC consortium's approach to Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)?

Within SPARC, we are committed to leading by example when it comes to issues of gender equality and social inclusion. We do this in two ways: internally and externally. Internally - within the project team and our internal operations and processes - we are committed to equal opportunities within human resources policies and governance structures. Externally - within the evidence we generate and the advice we share - we are committed to applying a lens of gender equality and social inclusion to ensure that we make visible the sources of inequality, and then provide policy and programme recommendations that address these.

• What does SPARC aim to do differently in terms of GESI?

Traditionally, programmes address GESI in one of two ways. One option is to have a discreet component for gender and social inclusion - which is great for generating specific outputs but can run the risk of the rest of the programme continuing in a gender blind way, with people thinking: "It's ok - we have other people addressing GESI". The other option is to mainstream GESI completely across the programme, ensuring that a lens of gender equality and social inclusion is integrated across all operations, and thus it is the responsibility of everyone. This is great for encouraging the shift in ways of seeing that is necessary to overcome gender blindness, but it means that all outputs look slightly different, rather than having GESI-focused outputs. SPARC will do both.

• Why is the consortium taking this approach?

My personal preference is for mainstreaming GESI across all operations - the latter of the two ways of working above - because I believe this is what we need to transform thinking so that, in future, we no longer expressly need to address GESI because it will be obvious

and appear by default in all we do. However, since that future is some way away, and we still need specific evidence to highlight why we are (re)producing situations of gender inequality and social exclusion, within SPARC we will also be producing some GESI-specific outputs. So, it's essentially like a double-pronged approach.

- **How SPARC will track and evaluate change/ impact?**

GESI has been integrated into the operations procedures within SPARC – meaning that it has to be addressed in the process of evaluating all research and technical assistance activities prior to their approval. For overall SPARC programme evaluation we are following IDRC's [Research Quality Plus framework](#), which also explicitly tracks gender – so we will have good opportunities to track and evaluate change and impact from this approach.

- **What do you feel are the most pressing evidence, research, policy and programming gaps in terms of GESI?**

Many of the GESI-related issues across pastoral livelihoods in current and protracted crises (as well as more broadly!) have typically been invisible. Sadly, it is still not the norm to collect sex-disaggregated data – yet alone to disaggregate by other facets of identity, such as (dis)ability, so we often can't tell exactly what the nature of inequality and exclusion is. Without that, we may miss opportunities to interrogate the underlying driving forces that give rise to those situations of inequality. In particular, without that we cannot target knowledge to policies and programmes that aim to redress the causes of these inequalities. In SPARC, as well as making these differences visible by integrating GESI across our thematic working groups, we hope to particularly interrogate the needs and experiences of marginalised groups, including women, youth and people with disabilities.

- **What is already being done well and could be built upon?**

Despite not being the norm, there is a growing body of literature that looks particularly at women's issues and gender differences in pastoral livelihoods in protracted and recurrent crises – particularly in east Africa. Within SPARC's mandate, we have the opportunity to ensure that this evidence is effectively packaged and communicated to inform more equitable policies and programming in SPARC countries.

- **What are, or should, be the differences in the GESI approach taken in different parts of Africa, and the Middle East?**

Gender, like many other facets of social identity (e.g. ethnicity) is socially constructed, which means that it varies from place to place. As a result, GESI issues are not the same across all SPARC countries. That means that we will not be able to unproblematically assume that findings from one country would be transferable to another context. Some of the SPARC countries – particularly east Africa – have a greater quantity of GESI-related research undertaken than others. So, we will have to customise our approach.

- **What has been the impact of Covid on the GESI agenda in research, development funding and programming more broadly?**

Covid has been a livelihood stress like others that are experienced in SPARC countries, including extreme events and land degradation, so we have insights from the effects of those other stresses. We know that livelihood stresses do not affect everyone equally – and often they tend to magnify exploit existing inequalities. In the short-term, this means that attempts to alleviate the impacts of COVID need to be socially differentiated. Of course, the additional challenge, particularly given the global nature of the pandemic, is that development funding flows are likely to be reduced. This will have impacts across the entire development, and research for development, agendas – which makes it even more critical that we are able to highlight the GESI-related implications!

- **What drives you personally in terms of your passion for GESI?**

Until we live in a world where everyone has equal opportunities, I believe it is the responsibility of those of us with privilege who can to ensure that we give voice to those who are disadvantaged and not normally heard. That is the only way we will be able to transform the underlying structures that prevent access to equal opportunities.

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Syrian refugees on the Greek island of Lesvos
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