

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION LEARNING SYNTHESIS

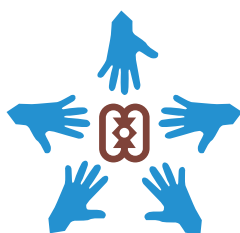
BACKGROUND

Strengthening Transparency, Accountability and Responsiveness in Ghana (STAR-Ghana) is a voice and empowerment programme that supports civil society to strengthen the accountability and responsiveness of the state to citizens' issues.

The programme is in its second phase, the first phase having ended in April 2015. The second phase is about implementation, and builds upon the results and learning from Phase 1. It aims to achieve a step-change in how citizens are supported to address the underlying constraints to democratic governance and inclusive and sustainable development.

The programme has a dual focus. STAR-Ghana aims to catalyse the efforts of civil society towards systemic change, and work towards the creation of a national institution and endowment fund to sustain support for these efforts beyond the current programme.

STAR-Ghana has invested in the development of a robust and comprehensive gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) strategy. The strategy seeks to define an approach that ensures that equal opportunities for women, girls, men and boys, and a 'level playing field' for all social groups, are core values and practices within STAR-Ghana. The aim is to imprint GESI into the institution's DNA, and into its role as a convener, coordinator and catalyst of civil society.



**STAR
Ghana**

Strengthening Transparency,
Accountability and Responsiveness



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF DENMARK
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To meet this objective, the strategy looks *inward* to what is happening within the institution as well as *outward* to its programmes and partnerships. The strategy sets out STAR-Ghana’s ambition to develop an institution and workplace that embrace social inclusion and equality; support programmes and grant partners to consider equality and social inclusion in their design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and learning; and facilitate collective action and movement building in respect to GESI.

As STAR-Ghana is coming to the end of its first year of implementation, this is an opportune moment to reflect on progress to date in operationalising the GESI strategy. The GESI work unit, comprising a GESI and Capacity Building Manager and Officer, supported by GESI Advisors at Social Development Direct (SDDirect), have gathered findings from a recent GESI scan. These were highlighted in discussions with the project management team, steering committee and the GESI technical advisory group and shared in STAR-Ghana documentation, such as the quarterly and six-monthly reports. This process, combining stakeholder and practitioner feedback with documentation and evidence from implementation, was used to assemble a concise and accessible analysis of key lessons learned thus far, as well as programme adaptations that have followed from these lessons.

This report seeks to synthesise the main learnings to date and inform a forward-looking adaptive programming approach as we move into the second year of implementation. We asked ourselves the following learning questions:

- How effective have our efforts been to integrate GESI into STAR-Ghana overall, and into each strategic element?
- What are the pre-conditions for success? What challenges did we face and how did we overcome them? What does this mean going forward?

In developing this report, we looked at two key areas of concern. First, we assessed the practical issues affecting the GESI work unit and the programme management team more broadly during implementation. Second, we reflected (at both programmatic and operational levels) on the strategies, tools and methodologies mobilised by STAR-Ghana to adapt its GESI approach to its context – and to maximise the preparedness of stakeholders to address GESI in their work.

As we consider the learning synthesis to be integral to STAR-Ghana’s ongoing learning platform, Communities of Practice and Learning, this report will be updated annually.

LESSONS LEARNED

TOP-LEVEL LESSONS

STAR-Ghana aspires to place GESI at the heart of its programme – and of the independent STAR-Ghana entity that will be created by the end of Phase 2. While gaps exist, as detailed below, the building blocks for success in this aspiration are in place. We found that there is a high level of commitment within STAR-Ghana to mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion.¹

1. Mainstreaming means making the concerns and experiences of women and excluded groups an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, so that inequality is not perpetuated.

This is in part attributable to Christian Aid’s careful selection of senior leadership and investment in technical expertise and dedicated programme resources.

While necessary, however, these building blocks are not sufficient for the realisation of the goal ‘to put gender equality and social inclusion at the heart of the programme’. A key missing ingredient is a shared and measurable vision of what this looks like.

To update the strategy for the next year, the GESI work unit will engage the steering committee, the GESI technical advisory group and project management team to develop a list of practical GESI success indicators. The objective will be to come up collectively with a shared vision, to ensure everyone shares the same vision and the strategy for its achievement.

Specific lessons related to placing GESI at the heart of STAR-Ghana are as follows:

- **Having a robust GESI strategy makes a difference:** Investing time and energy during the inception phase to produce a strategy that builds on lessons from Phase 1 of the programme has been essential. The strategy was informed by an early scoping exercise and included contributions from a GESI technical advisory group, all of whom have extensive expertise in gender and inclusion. Having a strategic document in place has supported the GESI and Capacity Building Manager in taking up her role and having direction and focus. There have, however, been some weaknesses in communicating and translating the strategy effectively to project management team members, in a way that is meaningful to their own work units. In the period ahead, STAR-Ghana should give priority to more effective internal communication and promotion of the GESI strategy, which is necessary to build shared ownership and collective action on GESI (see Strategic Area 1).
- **Understanding the context and recognising an historic bias towards gender equality have been important to advance a stronger focus on social inclusion – however, there are challenges.** Both internationally and within Ghana, gender equality is a familiar concept around which there has been significant programming. In Ghana, donors, government and civil society organisations (CSOs) have engaged with gender equality for almost three decades. In contrast, social inclusion is a much more recent concept. STAR-Ghana has recognised this and has put in place considerable efforts to address this gap within the programme. For example, there are explicit references to social inclusion in the strategy, as well as two distinct strategic objectives that address collective action and movement – building both gender equality and social inclusion (Strategic Areas 3 and 4). Additionally, STAR-Ghana established a recruitment policy that ensures diverse and representative hiring, including of people with disabilities. Nevertheless, the GESI scan highlighted uneven levels of technical understanding of social inclusion by project management team members. More work is needed to build a more consistent capacity and common approach (see Strategic Area 1).
- **The investment by donors, the steering committee, the consortium and STAR-Ghana senior leadership in GESI expertise, programme focus and partnerships, has been important in putting the building blocks in place.** STAR-Ghana has increased investment in GESI compared to the first phase by: recruiting two full-time and highly qualified technical staff; investing in a specialist GESI-focused consortium partner (SDDirect); putting in place a seven-person GESI technical advisory group made up of experts from civil society and government in Ghana; and investing in a diverse range of partnerships (there are around 35 strategic and grants partners carrying out standalone GESI projects, in addition to the other mainstream grants partners). These investments have sent a clear message about the weight given to GESI within the programme, and have ensured timely support to, and engagement with, national and local stakeholders. The challenge going forward is for STAR-Ghana to coordinate and capitalise on these investments.

- **Building partnerships with state institutions has created the potential for strengthening responsiveness to civil society demands in relation to GESI.** While STAR-Ghana does not support state actors as a mainstream strategy outside its parliamentary workstream, it does have the flexibility to provide support to state institutions in line with its theory of change. This flexibility has enabled the programme to explore partnerships with key state institutions that have different and reinforcing roles relating to GESI. It also acknowledges that addressing both the ‘supply’ and ‘demand’ sides is required to achieve substantial, systemic advances in gender equality and social inclusion. State actors require technical support to strengthen their capacity to fulfil their constitutional and statutory mandates and to respond appropriately to demands from civil society.

LEARNING BY STRATEGIC AREA

Strategic Area 1 – Organisational development

Embedding GESI into the internal functioning of STAR-Ghana is central to it becoming an organisation where there are equal and mutually empowering relationships between men and women and different social groups. The GESI scan process assessed the extent to which STAR-Ghana has achieved this to date. We found that although there is strong commitment and will to advance GESI, the levels of capacity across the project management team vary, and further support is needed to ensure each work unit understands its role in achieving the GESI strategy objectives. Progress can be strengthened over the coming period by ensuring that GESI is integrated into job descriptions and performance reviews, thereby encouraging collective responsibility for gender and inclusion.

Specific lessons include the following:

- **Responsibility and accountability for integrating GESI into STAR-Ghana need to be clearly spelled out.** Although the STAR-Ghana team is collectively responsible for implementing the GESI strategy, there is weak accountability and uneven ownership across work units. A key lesson is that work units have not all equally engaged with and understood the strategy. This indicates that the strategy has not been sufficiently translated and communicated, in clear and accessible terms, and that the link between the strategy and individual work units has not been made clear. These gaps need to be addressed in Year 2. It will also be important to integrate GESI into job descriptions and performance assessments to generate collective accountability for GESI. Corrective action could include an updated GESI strategy, with an appendix clarifying roles and responsibilities, as well as refreshing job descriptions and performance assessments to reflect these.
- **In the absence of significant project management team capacity building on GESI to date, technical know-how for GESI varies; this is seen in the inconsistent levels of GESI analysis and integration across work units.** STAR-Ghana has invested in GESI expertise by recruiting a GESI work unit, as outlined above. Nonetheless, there is still a need for further investment in building the project management team’s skills. The GESI scan also showed that project management team members are still grappling with social inclusion, both conceptually and as a reality, and with identifying appropriate programme responses to gender inequality and social exclusion.
- **Results from the political economy analysis commissioned by STAR-Ghana in 2016 confirmed that traditional analyses tend to marginalise or ignore gender and social issues.** STAR-Ghana has recognised this gap and is currently developing a Terms of Reference for a GESI-embedded political economy analysis. This will explore and identify key factors that affect gender equality and social inclusion – including political issues, institutions (rules and norms), social and cultural practices, beliefs and values, as well

as historical and geographic factors. The objective is to develop a more grounded, real-life and real-time picture of how GESI dynamics operate in Ghanaian politics and society and to use this knowledge to design and adapt programming, including the projects undertaken by strategic partners.

- **The GESI scan has been an important tool in assessing STAR-Ghana’s institutional strengths and weaknesses.** It was adapted from best practice and tailored to suit STAR-Ghana as a programme and institution. The scan was an extremely positive process, allowing the project management team, steering committee and GESI technical advisory group to reflect on progress to date and draw up an action plan for the coming year. The process was documented in order to be shared with grantees and partners and to support them in carrying out GESI scans of their own.

Strategic Area 2 – Mainstreaming gender equality and social inclusion in programmes

This strategic area is aimed at establishing STAR-Ghana as an institution that integrates GESI into its mainstream programme work. STAR-Ghana has made progress in integrating GESI into its various grants calls. More needs to be done to ensure that grantees and partners understand what is expected from them in terms of GESI (eg, minimum standards, GESI analysis). In addition, the grants manual requires revision to ensure that STAR-Ghana builds on lessons from Phase 1 and addresses any capacity gaps.

- **STAR-Ghana has put considerable effort into mainstreaming GESI within the grants call, but more needs to be done.** The programme has not yet built on lessons from Phase 1 around what did and did not work to mainstream GESI within the grants. In addition, the GESI scan found that while the grants manual – a core guiding document for grant making and approved standards and procedures – references GESI and includes GESI-related targets, it does not provide substantive direction or guidance on grant making with a GESI lens and informed by GESI analysis.
- **Without mainstreaming protocols in place, the programme can miss opportunities to effectively integrate GESI.** For example, prior to the launch of an anti-corruption call, the GESI work unit was not consistently engaged in developing the Terms of Reference for a consultant to develop a series of discussion papers to inform consultations towards the call launch. As a result, the papers failed to sufficiently consider GESI in their analyses of the impact of corruption and recommendations (this is now being rectified). In future there needs to be stronger collaboration between the GESI work unit and other teams, including on the design of the upcoming local government call. In addition, more needs to be done to integrate a GESI perspective into plans and next steps for the SMS Voices and parliamentary programmes.
- **Grants partners are addressing issues of access for women and marginalised groups, however more guidance is needed to ensure meaningful participation and engagement of different groups.** For example, an evaluation of the election grants found that although GESI was featured in the call advertisements, guidelines and grant application forms, not all partners paid sufficient attention to GESI in their activities. Furthermore, the evaluation cites several examples related to improved representation and access for women and marginalised groups, but little evidence of impact on the quality of engagement around the electoral process.

Strategic Areas 3 and 4 – Collective action and movement building

As STAR-Ghana is only at the end of its first year of implementation, we have consolidated learning on Strategic Areas 3 and 4. These strategic areas aim to give targeted attention to issues related to gender equality or social inclusion as standalone programmes or projects, as a substantive way to generate specific results in these areas. STAR-Ghana's decision to issue a specific grants call for GESI highlighted very early that gender equality and social inclusion are core values and a key domain of change for the programme. In addition, the decision to hire accompaniers to support the partners has gone well and further signalled GESI as a priority. As a further learning exercise, STAR-Ghana should reflect on the accompanier model by consulting with strategic partners to find out how they value this support. In addition, in the context of a two-tier model of national- and local-level partners, more needs to be done to ensure linkages between the two levels of partners as well as to improve the quality of engagement, particularly with smaller partners.

- **Complementing the mainstream grant calls with a standalone GESI call has put STAR-Ghana in a strong position to take up issues raised at the grassroots level.** The GESI call has generated a broader mix of partners for STAR-Ghana (small/innovative and strategic partners). Without this intentional design and diversity, the programme would have continued to mirror the bias noted in Phase 1 of working predominantly with national-level partners.
- **STAR-Ghana has addressed a bias towards larger and more established CSOs by putting in place a two-tier grant system made up of strategic partners and smaller grant partners at the district or local level.** However, learning at this early stage suggests that there are some challenges in this approach. For example, STAR-Ghana has not been able to generate the same level of quality in their engagement with smaller grant partners as they have with the larger CSOs. Strategic grant partners receive more money and benefit from longer grant periods, ongoing support from accompaniers, and a bigger investment from the project management team in programme quality. In contrast, small grant partners receive more limited and targeted technical assistance – for example, assistance focusing on financial management capacity strengthening which is designed to meet due diligence requirements.
- **The relationship between STAR-Ghana accompaniers and grant recipients is extremely important.** The accompaniers held two or three meetings with prospective grantees to help ensure proposals were technically and programmatically viable and sufficiently GESI-focused. This support proved critical, particularly for organisations that did not have much experience of applying for donor funds or with GESI-focused partnerships. In general, applicants struggled to achieve a logical flow between objectives, strategies and activities when developing their results frameworks. In consequence, the accompaniers spent a significant amount of time supporting this element of their work.
- **Ensuring grantee interventions are strategically focused is a challenge.** Across the proposals there was a tendency towards delivery of services rather than broader strategic thinking around systematic constraints to GESI. For example, the Alliance for Reproductive Health Rights, Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition and TV3 Ghana all required support in understanding and then integrating a strategic advocacy focus into their proposals. This posed a risk with regards to grant partner ownership of their initiatives and could potentially undermine the GESI grant call's aim of addressing systemic barriers to equality and inclusion. This risk could be mitigated in part through refinement of the overall grants strategy to address the potential collective impact of individual initiatives and identify clear opportunities for grantees to work together.

- **Creating horizontal and vertical links between strategic partners and small grants partners is challenging.** One of the aims of the GESI call was to encourage collaboration between grantees in order to increase their collective capacity to exert vertical influence. However, consultations with partners in Tamale and Takoradi highlighted several barriers. For example, smaller CSOs struggle to compete with larger organisations for funding. Organisations led by marginalised groups – particularly those with disabilities – often lack the confidence to engage beyond their immediate context and/or established spheres of activity. It was also noted that the distrust created by competition between grantees – actual or perceived – can undermine efforts to promote collaboration.
- **Creating communities of practice and learning around GESI thematic areas will support collective action.** The co-creation of strategic proposals between grantees, the GESI technical team and accompaniers was an opportunity for stimulating joint analysis and design of collective actions, responses and interventions around GESI. Despite the difficulty partners experienced with the elaboration of collective actions (which is not always their favoured way of working), the process highlighted how collaboration and mobilisation of partners to coordinate their efforts will be critical to achieving the systemic changes flagged in the GESI call.

LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE

The lessons harvested under each strategic area show how STAR-Ghana has built on the learning from Phase 1 and has put in place necessary building blocks for success in its aim of putting gender equality and social inclusion at its heart. However, challenges have been identified, and STAR-Ghana needs to continue to reflect on its approach if it is to continue to build its internal capacity and move forward in this area.

- **A GESI scan should be carried out on an annual basis.** The first baseline scan, in August 2017, focused predominantly on ‘inward’ GESI mainstreaming and used a self-assessment approach. This methodology was chosen because STAR-Ghana is in the early stages of implementation. The GESI work unit has recommended further scans. These will include a focus on outward-facing GESI mainstreaming and will integrate perceptions from external stakeholders such as grants partners and the government to ensure a more rigorous assessment.
- **The GESI work unit, in partnership with the monitoring and evaluation work unit, should develop a way to capture systematically and catalogue lessons emerging from GESI strategy implementation and meet the broader goal of placing GESI at the centre of the programme.** One suggestion is to document lessons, using a standard template, by project cycle phases (design, implementation and monitoring and evaluation) as well as by strategic element. This will help STAR-Ghana reflect on what can be done better at each point in the project, as well as within each strategic area. Systematically documenting lessons will help to ensure that learning is not lost, and increase the chances of lessons being used to adapt programming and improve further implementation.
- **STAR-Ghana should consider providing increased support to potential grantees during future calls and subsequent implementation.** This support could be provided in the form of additional sessions with accompaniers or through sessions with STAR-Ghana’s GESI, monitoring and evaluation, and finance teams. Such support would help to ensure

proposals are sound from both a technical and design perspective. More guidance could be provided to grantees to ensure that they move towards increasing access for marginalised groups, identifying strategic GESI entry points, and addressing more structural barriers for transformative change.

- **STAR-Ghana should refine its strategy to facilitate more effective collaboration between partners, including through the development of tools, capacities and incentives for partnership.** The upcoming GESI-themed political economy analysis process could provide an opportunity to understand better the incentives and skills that promote collaboration among CSOs in Ghana as well as the barriers that inhibit it. STAR-Ghana should also consider some investment in skills and methodology development for the project management team in building and brokering partnerships.
- **STAR-Ghana should reflect on manageable ways that it could provide more ongoing support to those partners with less capacity, while at the same time ensuring that partners still drive the process of implementation.** As noted, there has been a tendency for some organisations to rely on STAR-Ghana to make key decisions on the focus or approach of interventions, thereby creating risks in terms of their ownership of their initiatives.
- **STAR-Ghana should focus on building a loose coalition of CSOs around GESI, emphasising that collaboration rather than competition is encouraged.** STAR-Ghana should consider how it might more effectively build the confidence and visibility of its partner organisations, which may otherwise remain isolated in their traditional spheres of operation. Within emerging coalitions around GESI, STAR-Ghana should explore opportunities for smaller or lower capacity organisations to work with – and learn from – larger or more established counterparts.

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Contact STAR-Ghana

No 12, Obenesu Crescent
East Cantonments
Accra-Ghana

Postal address

CT DTD 13
Cantonments
Accra
Ghana

+233 (302) 774488

+233 (307) 012404

info@star-ghana.org

star-ghana.org

