Guidelines for Designing a PAGE-II Round 3 Research Proposal

Under the PAGE-II Round 3 Call for Proposals, PEP is seeking proposals for projects that aim to support policy processes through the gender-sensitive analysis of actual policy solutions and address key knowledge gaps and policy needs in terms of the evidence base.

Your proposal should address the six principal questions indicated below. Note that these guidelines do not follow the same format required in the formal submission of the proposal (as presented in the mandatory proposal template). Rather, the following aims to provide insights and advice on the substance of your proposal, focusing on how to address the main research questions.

Remember, it is important that your research is not be gender-blind. Throughout your proposal, show: a) that you have thoughtfully examined the literature and the research questions from a gender-sensitive perspective, and b) how you will use the data and methodological tools at your disposal in a gender-sensitive way.

1. What is the main question of interest?

Your study might have several objectives. However, in the presentation limit yourself to explaining what the key policy-related question in your research will be. You might also wish to explain (very briefly) why you think this is an interesting question to pose.

Consider:

- Does your key question address a "gender" issue?
  - For example, drivers of and constraints to rural female non-farm employment or to women's access to credit
- Or, have you allowed for heterogeneity based on gender in the question you are examining?
  - For example, determinants of entrepreneurial success
- If your research is focused on women, have you adequately justified this focus and contextualized your research question?
- If you cannot find a key question, you will need to redefine your study from scratch.

2. Has this question been addressed in a similar context (same country or region) before? If so, what were the results and what do you hope to achieve in addition?

The question has likely been addressed in the context you wish to study at least once. It would be useful to summarize the state of knowledge about the issues you will study - and explain clearly why you wish to study this again. This might include reasons such as:

- There are new data available, which are of better quality or offer a more accurate assessment of the policy issues and might change our perception of the problem.

- The previous study examined these issues until 19XX - there has since been a change in regime or policy that we can usefully analyse using more recent data.
- The previous studies are methodologically unsound or otherwise wanting in some critical way. You can improve on them substantially.
- If the question has never been addressed before, you are an innovator and only need to establish that the question is of interest.

3. **What is the value added in terms of research?**

   You will probably be attempting one of the following:

- Testing a particular theory or hypothesis which has not been tested in that (policy) context before
- Describing a particular phenomenon of interest, with a view to assessing its impact.
- Measuring an outcome (e.g. measuring poverty/ inequality):
    - This cannot be an activity for its own sake of course but must be driven by an underlying policy question of interest. For instance, a simple proposal might be to provide new information about the evolution of welfare in the country because it is likely that recent events (policy changes or shocks) have changed the underlying trend.

A paper must either offer evidence on something we know little about or try to settle a disputed question that could have a future policy impact. A proposal to confirm something which we think we know (e.g. "rural consumption poverty is higher than urban poverty" or "female-headed households are poorer on average") should only be entertained if for some reason we cannot be sure this is true anymore.

4. **What methods will you use in your study?**

You should offer a summary of the methods you intend to use and be clear about exactly how you will use them.

For instance, if you wish to measure vulnerability, you should explain how this is to be done – and explain precisely the advantages (and disadvantages) of your method. It would be best if you can explain this in your own words rather than relying on criticisms or support in the literature. The fact that others have used this method is not always sufficient: you ought to check whether the method is used in peer-reviewed journal articles and whether it has been strongly and persuasively criticized elsewhere.

Furthermore, it is likely that the methods will be familiar to the audience. Unless you are using an esoteric technique (or something new which has not previously been used in this context), a concise summary is sufficient - with an acknowledgement of no more than two main (gender-aware) references.

As a development researcher, you are likely to be presenting a proposal for measuring an outcome or testing a hypothesis about behavior that could impact future policy, therefore:

(i) If your presentation centers around measurement (poverty, mobility etc.), start by explaining why your data are reliable (and see point 5 below). Discuss the potential role of errors in measurement (in these data, not in theory).

(ii) If you are relying on a regression, begin with a clear (theoretical) justification for the specification of the model and the variables you plan to use.

- Explain the role of the variables you have included on the right-hand side. Does economic theory and existing evidence support including them? What factors other than your right-hand side variables might cause variation in the left-hand variable? (What are the variables you are likely to be unable to include?)
- Describe your identification strategy clearly. Much empirical work boils down to a claim that "A causes B" usually supported by some sort of regression. Explain how the causal effect you wish to pin down might be identified.
- If you plan to use an instrumental variable, explain the economic rationale for why the variable can be excluded from the regression and why it is relevant.
- If you are using panel data and have a fixed effect regression, explain carefully the kind of variation you can potentially explain. For instance, with household fixed effects, the regression coefficients are driven by the variation over time within each household. Without household fixed effects, the coefficient is (mostly) driven by variation across households at a point in time.
- Have you referred to a conceptual/theoretical framework (e.g. unitary vs. collective models of the household) that captures the gender aspect of your research question?
- Does your methodology adequately allow for gender differences? In your model specification, have you taken gender considerations into account?

5. What are the data you propose to use and why are they particularly suitable for answering your research question?

This is a critical part of the proposal. You need to explain the reason for the use of your particular data choice. You must establish that they are ideal for addressing your research question. This might be because:

- They have specific information on the variables that are vital for the analysis.
    - For instance, a study of intra-household allocation will require information on the separate categories of expenditures by husbands and wives and information on non-wage incomes for each.
- They cover an exciting period in the context you wish to study.
    - For instance, you have data over 10 years, during which there was a major change in policy or a major shock to the economy that you think will affect the outcomes you wish to measure.
- The quality of the data (on consumption or other dimensions of wellbeing) is excellent and can be established.

- This will offer more accurate measurement of the outcomes of interest - and perhaps even change what we know thus far. Or the data cover a period not studied thus far (the present).

Finally, offer some stylized facts drawn from the data you plan to use. The aim is to persuade the reader that the data are interesting, relevant and useful to future policy conclusions.

Be careful: It is common for questions to be addressed using any available dataset simply because the data are there. Ask yourself whether you have adequately exploited your data to tease out gender-differentiated implications of your research question. Is there a better data source that will allow you to do this, while enabling you to address your research question? It is important to explore these possibilities and not confine yourself to the readily available data. Trying to answer a good question using data that are not fit for that purpose is not a good strategy.

6. **Finally, explain why a policymaker (or other type of stakeholders, including the general public) might be interested in your research.**

What might we hope to learn from this study? Why should we care about your results? How may this evidence be used for future policy decisions?

Does your research take into consideration gender-differentiated impacts of policies? Will a policymaker reading your research be able to take away policy related lessons that "apply" to men and women? If your focus was (deliberately) restricted to women, will the policymaker learn how your research is more gender-aware than previous research focused on women only?