10 Steps for Operationalizing a Gender Analysis Study

1. Know your client. Who are the people that need the information from the gender study? Who are the people that will be expected to implement the recommendations? Interview them at the very beginning to understand their priorities and expectations. What are their priorities from the study? What do they know about the topic, so that you don't give them information they already know? What are the resources and time constraints that you need to take into consideration when formulating recommendations for them?
2. Do your background research (i.e., desk review). Before heading to the field, or even choosing your fieldwork methodology, you need to do your homework. Do enough background research in order to understand the target population of the study and the context in which the client is operating. In addition, it is very important to take this step to gather secondary, quantitative and qualitative data to shape the focus of your fieldwork so that you (a) do not repeat what is already known, (b) can dig deeper into issues, patterns, initiatives or programs that were mentioned or presented in the secondary review, but want to find out more about; and (c) can triangulate fieldwork findings.
3. Define your research questions for fieldwork. Research questions should be based on the objectives of the assignment, the priorities of the client and the existing information gathered during the desk review. Research questions should be broader than the questions that you will ask during interviews and focus groups, which will be more specific. Aim for 3-5 key research questions.
4. Design your fieldwork tools and techniques. Choose the tools and techniques that are most likely to get you the information you need to answer your research questions. Aim to have a mix of participatory tools and questionnaires. Then, customize your tools and questionnaires to the context and specifics of the research questions. Write out questionnaire guidelines with specific questions that you can ask directly during interviews and/or focus groups.
5. During fieldwork, respect your informants. Introduce yourself, explain the purpose of the interview/focus group, what you will do with the information, and thank them sincerely for their time. Remember that they are giving you their time for free. It is generally acceptable to provide drinks and snacks for focus groups participants. Focus groups should not last any longer than 1-2 hours.
6. Organize and analyze data as you go. Have a system for collecting and organizing information and data. Choose a system that works best for you. Audio-recorders with an mp3 hook-up can be very helpful, but make sure you ask informants' permission to use it. Assistant note-takers can also be very helpful, but train them and be clear about your expectations. Even so, do not rely on them for all of your notes. At the end of each day (or every few days), review notes and summarize your overall observations.
7. Regularly check expectations with your client. Stay in touch with your clients and update them on your progress. Share with them the overall observations as you go and get their feedback to see if you are on the right track in terms of meeting their expectations.
8. Write a short and concise report. Your client is likely overwhelmed with paperwork and reports. Find out what sections of the report they want to have more detail, and what sections they want to have less. For example, some clients will want a detailed overview of methodology. Others will not. An ideal size for a report is 15-30 pages, not including annexes depending on the scope of the assignment.
9. Use charts and graphics to analyze and present your findings. This saying, "a picture is worth a thousand words," is cliché for a reason. Charts and graphics can be stronger at getting your message across and make it easier for your client to read your report and understand your key points.
10. Make recommendations that are specific, action-oriented and realistic. Your client solicited you to do this study because they had an idea of what they wanted to do. Your recommendations should give them specific information on how to do that. Recommendations should focus less on what to do, and more on how to do it. Finally, recall the resource limitations the client told you about at the beginning of your assignment. Recommendations should be considerate of those resource limitations.