



Strengthening institutional capacities for policy research

Project led by the Science, Technology and Innovation Policy Research Organisation (STIPRO) - Tanzania

Abstract

In order to further consolidate the institution and support long-term sustainability, STIPRO used Opportunity Funds to execute a three-pronged approach to strengthening research capacity, improving organizational performance and enhancing policy linkages, communications and outreach. Through the STIPRO Fellows Program, research fellows at the organization were invited to attend a strategic planning session to develop a research agenda. Training sessions were also held to develop financial management capacities and improve fundraising and accounting proficiencies. To build capacity for communication, STIPRO held a three-day training workshop, followed by a communication strategy development exercise.

COLLABORATING INSTITUTIONS

In carrying out this project, STIPRO collaborated with and learned from several organizations, including Uganda's Advocates Coalition for Development and Environment (ACODE), and the African Centre for Technology Studies (ACTS) in Kenya.

WHAT THEY DID AND WHY

STIPRO is a young organization, established about 5 years ago. STIPRO's goal is to become a centre of excellence in science, technology and innovation (ST&I) policy research in Tanzania, and to act as a broker between ST&I policy researchers and policy makers and implementers in the country. To help achieve this goal, STIPRO used Opportunity Funds to carry out several activities aimed at strengthening research capacity, improving organizational performance and enhancing policy linkages, communications and outreach.

As part of its efforts in building research capacity and ensuring high quality policy research in ST&I, STIPRO initiated the STIPRO Fellows Program. The program is designed to assist in ensuring high quality research outputs, and to extend partnership with like-minded organizations worldwide. Using Opportunity Funds, STIPRO was able to invite its Fellows to attend a strategic planning workshop held in Dar as Salaam in June 2014.

In terms of improving organizational performance, through this project STIPRO was also able to acquire accounting software and train key staff in its use. Before this, STIPRO was using a manual system that was error prone. Being a young organization, another big challenge STIPRO faces relates to resource mobilization and fundraising for its projects and operational costs. The institution recognized the benefits it would gain from learning from other similar, but more experienced organizations, such as ACODE and ACTS. The project therefore allowed STIPRO's executive director to visit these organizations and learn from them.

Several activities were also carried out to help STIPRO enhance its policy linkages, communications and outreach. In a first instance, a study was carried out in collaboration with the Tanzania Science Journalists Association (TASJA) to assess the role of media in dissemination of information and nurturing of debates in ST&I issues in Tanzania and to learn more about the challenges associated with media coverage of ST&I issues. The study involved about 20 mass media houses. After the research was finalized and report written, a feedback workshop was organized, which brought together about 50 participants from different research organizations and media houses in Tanzania, as well as policy makers.

STIPRO also recognized the need to enhance the capacity of journalist in reporting ST&I issues and to train ST&I researchers to improve their communications skills – especially in engaging with the media. A seminar for journalists and ST&I researchers on science communication and media engagement was therefore organized, bringing together about 25 journalists and 25 ST&I researchers.

Another key activity aimed at enhancing STIPRO communication at the organizational level was the development of a communications strategy. A consultant was hired to help the organization with the task. The process was consultative and participatory, involving interviews with STIPRO staffs and stakeholders. The consultant worked closely with the STIPRO Communications Officer throughout the process.

Finally, it was decided that STIPRO should be rebranded. Opportunity Funds were therefore used to finance the redesign of the STIPRO logo and all communication materials and needed improvements to the STIPRO website.

RESULTS

The Opportunity Funds have allowed STIPRO to improve in many facets of its operations, helping the institution to become more strategic, visible, and effective. For instance, the opportunity to meet the Fellows gave STIPRO staff a unique opportunity for mentorship and strengthening partnerships with like-minded experts. Fellows agreed to support STIPRO researchers in defining research questions, techniques in conducting research, proposal writing, report writing, and publishing in international peer-reviewed journals.

The new accounting software acquired has helped to make STIPRO more efficient, and better able to ensure its accountability to donors.

Through the project, STIPRO was able to begin addressing some of the major stumbling blocks towards effective coverage of ST&I issues by media houses, that were identified through the study, such as inadequate training among journalist, lack of market for ST&I news and poor cooperation between researchers and journalists. In addition, STIPRO also had an opportunity to introduce its mission to a wider community. The visibility of STIPRO's research agenda and STIPRO as an organization have both improved.

NEXT STEPS

The Opportunity Funds facilitated the realization of many activities that would have been impossible otherwise. The activities have enabled STIPRO to achieve important milestones. STIPRO will now focus on implementing the research agenda and communications and outreach strategies it has developed in the last year, continuing its growth towards consolidation and sustainability.