

TIST Best Practices on Gender and Leadership

TIST has developed a series of Best Practices related to opportunity and gender equality, in order to pursue equality, while taking advantage of TIST participants' talents and gifts.

When attending seminars, it is TIST Best Practice for each group to send one man and one woman. This ensures that there is gender equality in accessing and sharing knowledge. It also allows for a broader range of opinions and perspectives to be shared at the seminars. Similarly, when TIST is sending an expansion team, it sends a team with one man and two women. This sends a message that men are welcome and active in TIST, and that women are encouraged to act in leadership roles within the program.

It is a TIST Best Practice to proactively ensure that women have equal access to leadership roles. Rotating Leadership helps to identify leadership potential. After this identification, it is easy for the status quo to persist with male-dominated leadership. TIST takes steps to not only identify but also actively support and encourage women who wish to lead. Leaders are built up in a number of ways, including through the practice of Kujengana.

Rotating Leadership

Rotating Leadership is a proven Best Practice of TIST that dates back to the program's beginning. The concept of Rotating Leadership is one of the original components of Small Group formation and supports other TIST Best Practices. Rotating Leadership takes place in the Small Group, Cluster, and Group of Cluster Council (GOCC) levels. At the Small Group level, a new Leader and Co-Leader are selected each meeting to lead the group. At the Cluster and GOCC levels, a new Accountability Person is elected every four months, of alternating gender. At this time, the current Accountability Person becomes the Co-Leader, and the Co-Leader becomes the Leader.

Rotating Leadership Best Practices include: agreeing from the beginning to rotate leadership, giving every person a chance to lead and co-lead, and not letting anyone dominate discussion.

The practice of Leadership Rotation allows for Kujengana to work well. With Rotating Leadership, people are able to learn from the Kujengana received by previous leaders and implement these lessons when they become leader. Without Rotating Leadership, this would be a practice that only benefits the leader of the group; with Rotating Leadership, the entire group learns from the experiences of each member and has a chance to apply these lessons when it is their turn to lead. People are also less likely to be critical of leadership if they know that they will have an opportunity to lead. They will try to learn from the successes and failures of previous leaders, rather than engaging in negativity and criticism.

This practice allows for a democratization of access, allowing youth and women to take on leadership roles that they might otherwise be barred from. By implementing Rotating Leadership practices at each level, TIST is able to develop leaders who can assume increasing responsibility if they want to. In particular, groups such as women and youth report that their experience with Rotating Leadership often encourages them to take more active roles in their community, church,

or other civic enterprises. The practice of Rotating Leadership is further connected to the TIST Values, which stress service to one another in place of a hierarchical structure.

Kujengana

Kujengana is a critical component of TIST, and a proven Best Practice. The Swahili translation of Kujengana literally means, “to build each other up”. Within the context of TIST, Kujengana has two parts. Before the end of a meeting, participants say one specific, positive thing that the leader did. In addition, people can mention gifts that the leader has demonstrated. A leader responds to the reception of Kujengana with a simple “thank you,” without any further discussion. Most cultures are taught to criticize, and thus implementing Kujengana takes practice and training.

Kujengana is a useful Best Practice for many reasons. An emphasis on using positive information allows leaders to understand and develop their talents. When combined with another best practice, Rotating Leadership, everyone in the group is given Kujengana in turn. This practice allows for the group to learn what each member thinks is important in a good leader; each member is able to develop leadership skills simply by listening, even when they are not serving as a leader or giver of Kujengana.

TIST has found that the focusing on positives enables otherwise timid people to speak out and grow as leaders. Focusing on negatives can reinforce hesitance to participate. This is particularly true with youth, women, and other social groups that already face cultural barriers to participation. When you focus on positives, people do not rebel or push back, but will listen to your voice with an open mind. Kujengana is best understood as a double blessing that helps both the recipient and the group as a whole.

Payment for Environmental Services

TIST uses a Payment for Environmental Services (PES) model to incentivize tree planting and share profits from carbon credit sales. In our largest operational country, Kenya, women own approximately 5% of the land. Women farmers comprise 47% of the program participants in Kenya. TIST pays for the ecological service of planting and keeping live trees rather than tying remuneration to land ownership. This helps to ensure that women are properly compensated for their work. Although Kenyan law has recently progressed to expand female inheritance, this has done little to change tradition and norms. According to independent third-party verification, female TIST farmers realize approximately 95% of the benefits of their male counterparts, far outpacing gender pay gaps in the western world.

Gender Balance

TIST leadership is comprised of both men and women at each level. When Small Groups send representatives to Cluster meetings, they must send one man and one woman. In Cluster leadership, there are always an equal number of men and women over time. TIST Kenya is managed by a Leadership Council which is comprised of 50% women. Similarly, the Quantifiers and people who work with TIST in the field are approximately 50% women.