

Editorial: Skills assessment for research grantees of the Higher Education Improvement Project

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Building the capacity of academic leaders is central to the success of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) globally in an era of increased internationalization and competition. In this context, capacity building is a fundamental approach to increase knowledge, skills, and competence (OECD 2007). For example, universities in China and European Union continually worked to improve the capacity of faculty staff in response to current challenges (Cai and Hölttä, 2014). China and India have become more competitive due to the effectiveness of capacity building programs within their HEIs, increasing standards of knowledge production and innovation (Scott et al., 2008). Zhao and Minns (2019) describe the need for academics at HEIs to prove the impact of their research activities, resulting in greater levels of accountability and return on investment in universities.

Sanyal and Varghese (2006) demonstrate that HEIs require knowledge, skills and competencies to be transferred to students to ensure continued success. Schuller (2007) specifically refers to capacity building as not only

being about training individuals but also activities that improve functionality at the organizational, sectoral and national levels. In Africa, providing opportunities for staff to work in other country contexts is a key strategy of universities, wishing to benefit from the internationalization of the sector (Egron-Polak & Hudson, 2014). Organizations such as the Southern African Regional Universities Association (SARUA) play a significant role in seeking opportunities for existing and emerging leaders of HEIs to become internationally mobile (Kotecha and Vosesa (2011). In Cambodia, the Royal University of Phnom Penh (RUPP), one of the largest universities in Cambodia, has focused great attention on capacity building. However, these activities have been constrained by limited financial resources and institutional structures to support faculty staff to access local, regional, and international opportunities for capacity development (Brooks, and 2010).

The Higher Education Improvement Project (HEIP) is a six-year project at RUPP that will operate between July 2018 and June 2024. The project aims to improve the quality and relevance of higher education and research in the STEM and agricultural fields at target HEIs in Cambodia and improve governance of the sector as a whole. As part of Component 2 of the project, *Improving Research in STEM and Agriculture*, RUPP has accessed 3.3 million USD in grants to fund fourteen projects that assist local academics to conduct and publish research in international peer-reviewed journals. As a part of this program, the University Research Committee of the HEIP project conducted a skills assessment (Figures 1, 2, and 3). Of the eight Principal Investigators (PIs) and 18 Co-Principal Investigators (Co-PIs) that participated in the assessment, 73.1% were male, and 26.9% were female.

Figure 1. Types of training requested on research management and report writing

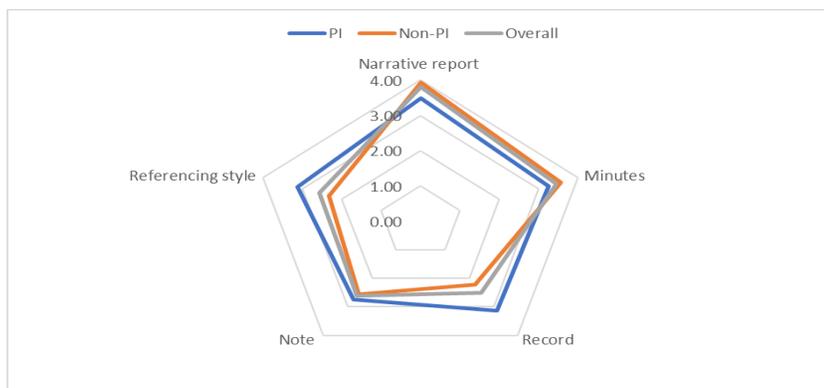
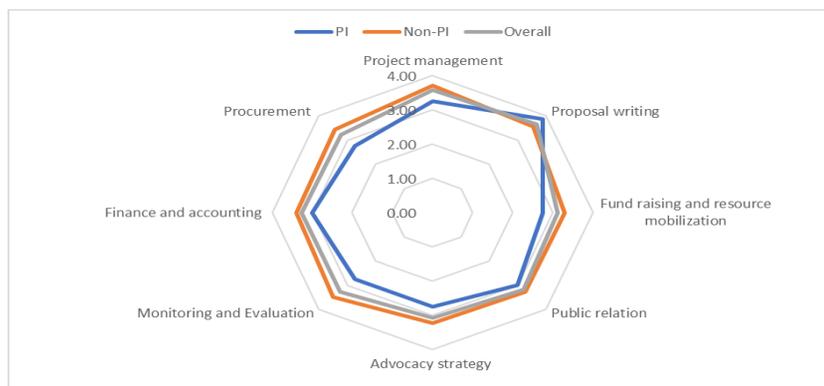
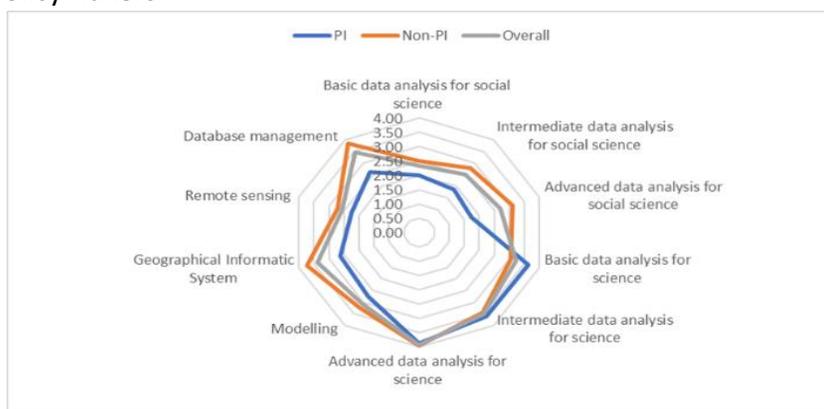
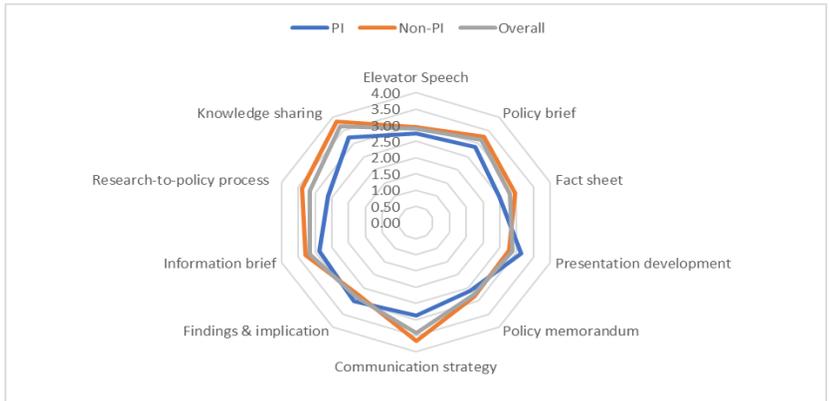


Figure 2. Types of training requested on data analysis and communication with policymakers





This skills assessment identified training needs across four main areas: (i) research management, (ii) report writing, (iii) data analysis and journal publications, and (iv) communication with policymakers. These areas were considered to be vital for faculty staff to upgrade their knowledge, skills, and competencies. Table 1 illustrates the training prioritized by RUPP for PIs and co-PIs between 2021 and 2024

Figure 3. Types of requests for training on journal publications

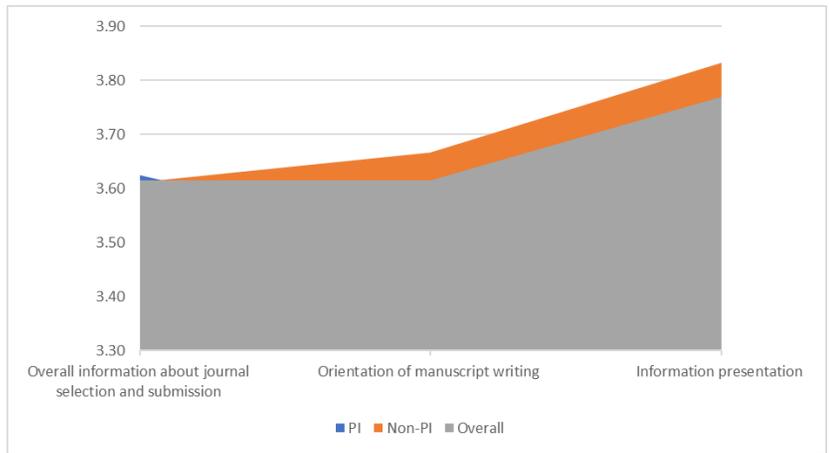


Table 2 shows the training opportunities requested by PIs and co-PIs as part of the HEIP Faculty staff expressed an interest in accessing new

techniques and methods beyond what the RUPP community could provide. All PIs and co-PIs were optimistic about carrying out the associated research projects due to the financial and technical support provided by the HEIP and the support offered to PIs and co-PIs to purchase experimental equipment for long-term research activities.

Table 1. Types of training to be organized by RUPP

Types of training	Target	Period
Research project management	PIs and co-PIs	2021-2024
Proposal writing	Co-PIs	2021-2024
Narrative report writing	PIs and con-PIs	2021-2024
Research methodologies and design	Co-PIs	2021-2024
Basic and intermediate statistics	Co-PIs	2021-2024
Information organization	Co-PIs	2021-2024

Table 2. Types of training to be organized by the HEIP team

Types of training	Target	Period
Advanced statistic, GIS, and modelling	PIs and Co-PIs	2021-2024
Lab and data management	PIs and Co-PIs	2021-2024
Big data analysis	PIs	2021-2024
Journal publication	PIs	2021-2024
Communication with policymakers	PIs	2021-2024
Factsheets and policy briefs	PIs	2021-2024

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