



GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN NILE BASIN TRANSBOUNDARY WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT AND DEVELOPMENT



SUMMARY

The transboundary aspect of water resources provides a critical opportunity for countries to work cooperatively toward greater economic growth, improved water security, and more resilience to shocks and climate change. To achieve this, the World Bank and donor countries act through the Cooperation in International Waters in Africa (CIWA), a multi-donor partnership, to address barriers to transboundary cooperation in integrated

water resource management (IWRM)¹ and development. Through its support to the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI),² CIWA-supported projects facilitate dialogue, identify sustainable investments, and build capacity to engage on, and manage, transboundary water issues.

CIWA's efforts to mitigate gender inequalities follows from its longstanding commitment to ensuring that gender is integrated into its

¹ IWRM is a framework designed to improve the management of water resources based on four key principles adopted at the 1992 Dublin Conference on Water and the Rio de Janeiro Summit on Sustainable Development. These principles hold that: (1) freshwater is a finite and vulnerable resource essential to sustain life, development, and the environment; (2) water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners, and policymakers at all levels; (3) women play a central part in the provision, management, and safeguarding of water; and (4) water has an economic value in all its competing uses and should be recognized as an economic good.

² <https://www.nilebasin.org/>

programs and projects. CIWA's recent adoption of a Gender and Social Inclusion Framework³ (2021), which seeks to catalyze transformative change to achieve sustainable gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in IWRM and development, reinforces this commitment. The Framework recognizes that a transformative approach requires sustained actions with many stakeholders at multiple levels, securing financial support, ensuring movement from commitments to implementation, and making change at all levels of governance. It also requires that all stakeholders adopt strategies to navigate resistance to women's equality.

This Learning Note focuses on capturing lessons learned and recommendations from CIWA's support to NBI's gender equality work from 2012 through 2020. This support was provided primarily through the Nile River Basin Support Program and the complementary project, Nile Cooperation for Results (NCORE⁴).⁵ Since support to the NBI operated at both the project and institutional levels,⁶ this Note considers lessons learned from past promotion of gender equality and acknowledges the practical realities of sustaining financial and technical contributions to address gender inequalities in a transformative way.

INTRODUCTION

The NBI was established as an intergovernmental partnership of the Nile riparian countries (Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan,⁷ Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda), with Eritrea as an observer. It seeks to develop the river basin in a cooperative manner, share socio-economic benefits, and promote regional peace and security to achieve its vision of sustainable socio-economic

development. The NBI is a leading regional organization that builds cooperation around IWRM and initiates projects and approaches that are inclusive and seek to help people living in poverty. It is composed of three entities: the Nile Basin Initiative Secretariat (Nile-Sec), the Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Program Coordination Unit (NELSAP-CU), and the Eastern Nile Technical Regional Office (ENTRO). As the executive arm, Nile-Sec strengthens member states' institutional and technical capacities and provides shared knowledge bases to support decision-making and action. ENTRO and NELSAP-CU are regional centers that support identification, preparation, mobilization implementation of cooperative investment projects, and technical capacity building.

This retrospective analysis of NBI's gender equality work is organized using the three dimensions of CIWA's Theory of Change Pillars (Information, Institutions, and Investments/Infrastructure).⁸ Much of the information was collected through the CIWA-supported gender assessment (via Nile River Basin Support Program technical assistance) that was conducted to inform the preparation of the new Nile Cooperation for Climate Resilience (NCCR)⁹ project (launched in March 2021), using standards outlined in the NBI's 2012 Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategy.¹⁰ While recognizing the successes, it reflects upon some of the key issues that have impeded advances in gender equality in NBI's work, while making recommendations for a transformative approach. Given that critical elements of NBI's gender equality work are dependent upon sufficient funding, it is important to consider that implementation of the recommendations depend on sustainable technical and financial resources that are not within the NBI's control.¹¹

3 <https://www.ciwaprogram.org/wp-content/uploads/CIWA-Gender-and-Social-Inclusion-Framework-1-1.pdf>

4 <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P130694>

5 The World Bank's support to other regional water institutions in Eastern Africa, such as the Lake Victoria Basin Commission and the East Africa Community are not included in this Note, nor is the relevant support to the NBI for gender work from other donors. This retrospective analysis of CIWA's support to the NBI, which was delivered through the Nile River Support Program, occurred in conjunction with support to the NCORE project and has been carried forward to support design and implementation of the new Nile Cooperation for Climate Resilience (NCCR) project. NCORE closed in November 2020, NCCR launched in March 2021, and the Nile River Basin Support Program overlaps both.

6 In this context, the project level consists of the actions that the NBI takes as a service provider for the benefit of member states, whereas the institutional level includes the NBI's own capacity, governance, leadership, and processes that direct its actions.

7 South Sudan joined the NBI in 2013, shortly after its independence.

8 <https://www.ciwaprogram.org/about/> These three "Is" structure the Theory of Change for the NBI's main project with CIWA from 2013-2020, Nile Cooperation for Results (NCORE). The NCORE project was preceded by numerous World Bank grants under the Nile Basin Trust Fund and is now being followed by the Nile Cooperation for Climate Resilience project (see the Annex for additional details), which is supported by CIWA.

9 <https://projects.worldbank.org/en/projects-operations/project-detail/P172848>

10 <http://ikp.nilebasin.org/document-repository/nbi-gender-mainstreaming-policy-and-strategy>

11 NBI's finances are primarily sourced through annual country dues, grants from a small number of large international development institutions, and in-kind contributions from member states. When country contributions are not received, when donors significantly change support, or when either stakeholder is not demanding the delivery of the projects with appropriate gendered outcomes, then it becomes difficult for the NBI to meet its gender commitments.

ANALYSIS AND LESSONS LEARNED

A. Information: for understanding risks, better decision-making, and monitoring compliance

Producing Knowledge Products Tailored to Gendered Perspectives: The NBI's Gender Strategy includes references to gender equality mainstreaming in knowledge products, tools, policies, and strategies (both institutional and regional/national). This commitment has produced gender-related outputs including two key documents ([Documenting Gender mainstreaming good practices in NBI programs and projects](#) and [The Nile Story Briefing Note 9 Benefits for women in Nile economic development](#)) and several reports that sought to integrate gender equality (such as the March 2016 and June 2017 issues of Nile News and the 2015 Corporate Report).¹² As part of its communications planning process, knowledge products can be enhanced by the inclusion of more frequent gender-focused issues and highlights. Women and water topics can also be addressed when

discussing irrigation, flood management, and evidence-based investment planning. It is also important for NBI's stakeholders to demand gender-related content.

Collecting Relevant Disaggregated Data and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E): The NCORE project design included opportunities to disaggregate data that count people (i.e. beneficiaries) and incorporate data elements that add important gender awareness. All data collection that counts people is expected to consider gender dimensions and be well operationalized into M&E plans. Conversely, despite these Gender Strategy data commitments, NBI's Results-Based M&E Policy does not reference gender, and despite some efforts to design NCORE's Results Framework to be gender-sensitive, these elements were weaker than the Strategy promised.

In preparing the next phase of support, a gender assessment for the NCCR project took into account lessons learned and recommended the following critical interventions to ensure accountability and delivery of results: 1) Devising a gender-mainstreamed results framework that recognizes the baselines for gendered benefits, setting gender-sensitive targets, and collecting gender-disaggregated results;

¹² Refer to either the NBI's website for knowledge products or access them through the new Integrated Knowledge Portal <http://ikp.nilebasin.org/>.



2) where possible, constructing indicators that measure gendered experiences; 3) requiring gender issues in the terms of reference (TOR) for assessments or deliverables, and 4) ensuring that evaluation teams possess a mix of evaluative skills and thematic knowledge, are gender-balanced, and include professionals from the relevant countries or regions.

Facilitating Activity-Specific Gender Analyses:

The NBI Gender Strategy calls for the alignment of its policies, processes, and resources to support interventions targeted to gender equality. Despite this commitment, a systematic application of gender analyses was not consistently included over the last 10 years. If gender deliverables are not included in the assessment TOR, then it is unlikely that assessment results will be able to inform downstream activities such as capacity-building, policy development, or training that appropriately address gender aspects. While activities aimed at addressing sustainability in IWRM have made progress on gender, a more comprehensive consideration of gender may have produced better results.

Gender analyses need to be conducted routinely for all projects and activities and at all project stages and levels. They should be followed by monitoring mechanisms that track whether recommendations are implemented. By leveraging a more effective strategic institutional partnership with organizations such as the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD), NBI can also leverage the knowledge, experience, and extensive network of civil society organizations (CSOs), many of which have experience in applying gender analyses and operationalizing gender-sensitive programming. Progress on addressing gender equality at the grassroots level also has the potential to motivate change at higher levels. A notable NBI success during NCORE was the improved use of the World Bank's standards for social and environmental impact assessments of potential investments.

B. Institutional Strengthening: to build trust, coordinate planning, and manage shared resources

Navigating Male Dominance and Resistance: Like most organizations affiliated with the water sector, the governance structure of NBI and its affiliates are male-dominated. This means that men's issues are prioritized because men's greater presence enables them to choose the topics and make decisions. Male dominance at meetings can also influence which issues

are prioritized and how decisions are implemented. The actual process of decision-making and its connection to cultural beliefs about men as decision-makers represent a big challenge for women's participation in NBI's processes.

Male dominance also limits women's presence in leadership, as technical experts, and as participants if they are not present in the member states at the appropriate levels and sectors. Male resistance is frequently connected to a male perception that giving space to women means losing power. Efforts and processes, such as making decisions that benefit both men and women, are required. Capacity building on developing strategies to change the mindset of zero-sum gendered power struggles and the belief that involving women somehow weakens men, is critical. This could include strategies on how to engage men.¹³ It will also require targeted training or awareness-raising sessions aimed at discussing key concerns such as misperceptions of gender issues as being only about women, understanding that gender equality need not be about men losing power, and fostering an appreciation of how men benefit from women's inclusion and empowerment.

Understanding the Nile Basin's Complex Environment:

Because of its regional nature, the NBI navigates multinational, multicultural, multilingual, and other contexts where there are clear differences in gendered conditions and expectations, with Nile countries being influenced by strong patriarchal values. It is therefore important to study these different cultural contexts to better understand how each perpetuates gender inequalities and how they can be overcome. Strategies may be needed to enable countries to review terminology and adopt language that speaks to their own contexts. There is also an opportunity to leverage the regional nature of transboundary water management, including by drawing on and disseminating best practices from Nile Basin member states that have successfully implemented gender strategies for IWRM. Identification of champions in country leadership also can influence the gender equality agenda.

Raising Awareness on Gender Equality: Overall, there has been an increase in awareness about gender issues within the NBI. This is evidenced by staff and other stakeholder interest in better understanding gender and how to apply it within projects and programs. NBI has raised awareness about gender issues in the basin through the NBI's Women Forum and numerous broad fora such as Nile Day and Nile Basin Development

¹³ For further information on strategies that have been developed to engage with men, please consult the web sites of ProMundo (<https://promundoglobal.org/>) and Sonke Gender Justice (<https://genderjustice.org.za/>)



Forum meetings. As noted above, NBI has included focused communications products on how its work affects women. NBI recently hosted its Nile media awards and included one prize for the best female entry but also had a gender balance among nominees for other awards. Despite the progress, the NBI's Gender Strategy's Action Plan's promise to implement broad-based, in-depth activities on gender through targeted awareness-raising campaigns has not been fulfilled, particularly regarding promised facilitation of regional and national gender equality networks and outreach.

Addressing the Implementation Gap: Like many policies, movement from commitment to implementation is often slow. As a first step, operationalizing what is captured in the commitment documents is needed. The NBI's upcoming revised Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategy, which is undergoing review, could open the door to a renewed consideration of how the words and intent on gender equality in governance documents can lead to concrete action. Leadership will be critical but should be followed by securing the buy-in at all levels and across all sectors where NBI works. Production and dissemination of operational tools could help close the implementation gap. There is also a need to work with leadership at regional and national levels to ensure that performance measures support accountability for integrating gender throughout the project cycle. It is equally important to ensure that gender considerations

are included in the TORs of NBI's activities, as well as any other relevant planning documents.

Building Capacity on Gender: The NBI has built internal capacity through staff training. However, the most recent gender-related training was several years ago, and there has been significant staff turnover. NBI's size and complexity also make it difficult to build capacity. While there is an awareness of gender and its relevance, it can be challenging to understand how to apply a gender lens in specific activities. There is therefore a need to incorporate strategies such as coaching and other activities to ensure a broad-based approach to capacity-building. Refresher training is also important to provide up-to-date information on new approaches and thinking related to gender issues and to ensure sustainability and a broad and transformative reach. It also requires NBI to allocate sufficient funding to ensure broad implementation of capacity-building efforts.

Increasing Women's Presence within the Transboundary Water Context: In Nile Basin countries, women water engineers are underrepresented. If water management is to be egalitarian, both men and women must have an equal voice. There has been a slight increase in the number of women serving as ministers of water and environment but the empowerment of women as water managers must also be felt at the grassroots level. Access to education represents a major obstacle to the acquisition of technical capacity.

Many girls in the Nile region face cultural barriers to advancing to the necessary educational levels and are frequently discouraged from choosing Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects, which are critical to WRM. In response, the NBI conducts internship and Young Professional programs that actively recruit women. However, in keeping with a transformative approach, multiple efforts may be needed to address deep-seated patriarchal norms.

Creating Favorable Governance Structures for Women: NBI's Gender Strategy identified the need for organizational change to facilitate greater attention to gender issues. It also sought to facilitate balanced input in activity design and decision-making. NBI's committees and related governance structures may not be designed with consideration for accommodating women's participation. Women tend not to be consulted to understand what kind of structures they want or need to create a more productive work environment. The contexts of meetings might be improved by learning from a needs assessment that identifies the best approaches to maximize women's participation. Findings from such a consultative process should influence the Council of Ministers (COM) as key decision-makers. NBI can include gender as an agenda item at COM meetings and create safe spaces where groups of men and women can share their perspectives and then collectively shape the narrative.

Promoting Ownership of the Gender Agenda: NBI's Gender Strategy is intended to establish an enabling environment that will foster specific strategies for changing gender patterns in NBI activities. The policy proposed three key actions: 1) undertaking an assessment to analyze the gender dimensions of development; 2) developing and implementing priority operational interventions that respond to the assessment's findings; and 3) monitoring the implementation of activities and results of interventions to inform subsequent planning processes. The Gender Strategy presents a situational analysis, guides effective gender-mainstreaming, and addresses gender issues throughout NBI institutions. Despite the existence of this strategy, NBI is a service provider and efforts to mainstream gender principally coincide with specific donors' and member states' support and priorities. To achieve long-term sustainability and commitment to gender, NBI, its partners, donors, and member states need to jointly make a realistic, demand-driven agenda that matches the resources that they are providing for gender equality actions.

Improving Gender Sensitivity in Work Environments: During NCORE support, NBI staffing included a gender and social inclusion focal point at each Center, but often this individual had many other duties that overshadowed providing leadership on gender equality. While the appointment of a gender focal point represents an important first step (and is consistent with the 2012 Strategy), too often the appointment of gender focal points is used as a stop-gap rather than ensuring a holistic, comprehensive response. Instead of isolating gender roles and actions, women's representation needs to be more effectively embedded within NBI's operations to facilitate institution-wide acceptance. A reasonable solution would be a formal institutional self-assessment that takes gender needs and barriers within the NBI itself into account. Consideration could also be given to reinvigorating a new Gender Action Plan with concrete measures and indicators.¹⁴ Adding reporting on gender equality as a regular agenda item at COM and Team Around Child (TAC) meetings would be one way to improve accountability and highlight its importance.

Strategic Partnerships: The NBI Gender Strategy noted that non-involvement of CSOs is likely to threaten the sustainability of collaborative management initiatives in the Nile Basin, particularly in terms of how they impact women and vulnerable groups. But progress has been made as strategic partnerships between institutions have been leveraged to advance gender efforts. In its policy, NBI has committed to working with governments and CSOs to diagnose the barriers to women's participation. Given that the NBD represents civil society interests drawn from across the basin, this presents an opportunity to ensure open dialogue and the involvement of diverse entities, while implementing an agenda that captures everyone's interests. The new CIWA-supported project, NCCR, builds on the successes of NBI and NBD through increased formal joint activities, yet additional improvements can be made in leveraging strategic partnerships for optimizing the use of scarce financial resources.

C. Investments/Infrastructure: to manage watersheds, develop groundwater, build storage, among others

Engagement of Women Stakeholders During Project Preparation: Opportunities for embracing gender equality and women's empowerment in projects need to begin at inception. For example, under NCORE, the NBI frequently worked with the NBD to organize

¹⁴ The NCCR prepared a draft report in May 2020 that provides an abbreviated analysis of NBI's implementation of its gender strategy through NCORE followed by the Strategy for the continuation of NBI's work through NCCR.

consultations with women's community groups during potential investment studies. Project design should identify and budget for opportunities to level the playing field for beneficiaries, address gender gaps, or consider potential gender-based violence and safeguards. Since women are not homogeneous, it is critical that project teams learn directly from intended female beneficiaries about their individual experiences. This includes consideration and documentation of other factors that are part of people's identities that can intersect with gender, such as age, ethnicity, socio-economic status, and marital status, to determine people's ability to benefit from a project.

Ensuring Investments Factor in Gender Commitments:

Institutional policy requires that project preparation processes (e.g., feasibility studies and project design) include an emphasis on gender issues and specifically include women and women's groups in community consultations. For example, in the preparation of the Kagera River Basin project, equal participation by women was promoted in decision-making processes and the management of both community-based, small-scale investments and longer-term, large-scale investments. In addition, project design focused on female-headed households, supported greater access to credit, formed a women's project advisory council, and cultivated an equal opportunities employment policy. Another example was the NBI's work on the Regional Rusumo Falls Hydroelectric Project's Resettlement Action Plan (RAP), which included a Livelihood Restoration Project that provided funding for women to develop poultry businesses. Bank policy is that the people must be compensated as good as, or better than, before resettlement, and the NBD was instrumental in consulting with women as part of the RAP process. Positive results have been reported in relation to improving the livelihoods of women and their families, including having sufficient funding to pay school fees, purchase household items, and improve people's overall well-being.¹⁵ The NBI and World Bank have implemented high standards for gender considerations related to investments and infrastructure, and this trajectory should be sustained.

D. Cross-cutting issues

Aligning Resources: As noted above, budgets and the conditions for funding have been a primary dilemma for NBI in fulfilling its Gender Strategy. Improved alignment of resource elements of the strategy could include: 1) making gender mainstreaming and gender analysis a corporate priority through the budget;

2) better defining points of accountability; and 3) optimizing limited resources within governmental and non-governmental organizations. This issue is not simply about donors or member states providing resources to the NBI but also about aligning the NBI's line item budgets with delivering on gender equality, which is generally a collaborative process between the NBI and its partners. One example is that many aspects of gender equality work proposed in the Strategy would normally be included in NBI's core costs (versus project costs) but when the NBI's financial resources shifted in 2014, the number of core staff was reduced. The transition in NBI's funding mechanisms that occurred during NCORE has coincided with a major loss in momentum for the NBI's Gender Action Plan. The process of allocating resources needs to ensure that opportunities to address gender inequalities are not sidelined.

Tackle Gender Stereotypes: Overall, gender stereotypes manifest in management roles at both the institutional and project level. For example, women tend to be assigned the management of perceived female-related tasks such as taking notes at meetings and gender assessments, while men are responsible for major technical projects, further reinforcing men as the technical leads and marginalizing women's role. Concerted efforts to involve women in projects that fall outside women's traditional roles are a critical first step. Encouraging men to take on typically female roles, such as note-taking, offers an opportunity to shift gender norms. It is important to identify role models and champions who are willing to play a mentorship and leadership role in countering gender stereotypes and promoting equitable relationships between men and women.

Gender in the New NCCR Project: CIWA supported NCCR design with a joint institutional gender assessment. At each stage of project design, a gender specialist met with technical leads and identified potential opportunities to apply a gender lens to the proposed activities. The identified opportunities were converted into gender-sensitive indicators and targets were set based upon collected data. The project design identified barriers to achieving gender-linked indicator results and mitigation measures. Terms of reference for the consultancies included requirements for collecting relevant gendered information or related outputs so that they can be carried forward into activity implementation. Finally, the resources for gender activities were built into budget lines.

¹⁵ "Successful Relocation and Compensation Program at the Regional Rusumo Falls Hydroelectric Project" NELSAP-CU. May 2019

Conclusion

The transformative approach undertaken by CIWA and examined here offers resources and innovative actions for adaptation to the Nile Basin context. It helps that the NBI has an established track record in addressing gender inequalities, has devised policies and programming that integrate gender considerations, and has the support of key stakeholders to reinforce efforts. Furthermore, while there are many challenges, the NBI and NBD often play a leadership role on gender equality within Africa transboundary waters management. This offers a critical opening to capture and document their own journey toward transformation of gender relationships so that other transboundary water programs and basins can also benefit. The establishment and use of collaborative platforms can also provide the opportunity for structured and continuous learning and exchange of information on how best to tackle gender inequalities. CIWA's own commitment and experience in fostering GESI in other projects that it supports, together with the recent release of its Gender and Social Inclusion Framework, will provide additional opportunities for cross-fertilization and learning on how to address gender inequality and social exclusion within the transboundary context in Sub-Saharan Africa.



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Ai-Ju Huang, CIWA Deputy Program Manager ahuang@worldbank.org

Ellen Hagerman, CIWA Senior GESI specialist ehagerman@worldbank.org

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ciwaprogram@worldbank.org

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