



ENSURING GENDER AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IS CONSIDERED AT THE PROJECT CONCEPT PHASE

INTRODUCTION

The World Bank and the Cooperation in International Waters, (CIWA), are strongly committed to promoting and achieving gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in the countries where they work. It is important to recognize that a failure to facilitate the full and active participation of all relevant stakeholders in project design and implementation frequently leads to the exclusion of women and other marginalized people. This can result in projects overlooking their needs and interests while also missing out on their positive contributions. Ensuring the meaningful participation of all parties requires allocating sufficient financial and technical resources throughout the project cycle. To be most effective, inclusion and participation should be incorporated as early as possible when a project or program is being conceptualized. As a Multi-Donor Trust Fund (MDTF) of the World Bank focused on facilitating cooperation among countries sharing transboundary waters in Africa, CIWA has aligned itself to the Bank's increased emphasis on GESI. To succeed, CIWA has called for a GESI lens to be applied to all the projects and programs that it supports.

This Learning Note is part of a series of notes that CIWA is developing to capture best practices, lessons learned and recommendations on applying a GESI lens to CIWA's work. The Learning Notes seek to assist CIWA staff and partners to better

understand why, how and where to integrate GESI considerations throughout the project cycle and at different levels and contexts. As such, the key learnings and recommendations are customized for the CIWA context while noting that many of the interventions have the potential for broader application. This first Learning Note seeks to reflect the technical input that CIWA's GESI expert provided as part of the process to review CIWA's Advisory Services and Analytics (ASA) product and projects at the preliminary phase. It presents some of the essential steps that should be taken early in project design to ensure that GESI is firmly entrenched in the implementation phase.

The lessons from this Learning Note have also informed the development of other CIWA documents on GESI, including CIWA's GESI Framework, a presentation on GESI made to CIWA's Advisory Committee and a Conference Paper that documents efforts to integrate GESI in the Nile Basin. All these documents form part of CIWA's commitment to promoting the adoption of a transformative approach to GESI by recognizing the need to undertake multiple interventions across many sectors and levels to tackle the deep-seated gender inequalities and shifting gender relationships within the transboundary water context in Africa at both the project and institutional level.

"Evidence shows that the meaningful involvement of women in water resources development, management, and use can lead to effective solutions to water problems, helping governments avoid poor investments and expensive mistakes, making projects more sustainable, and ensuring that infrastructure development yields maximum social, economic, and environmental results and furthers sustainable development goals."

Source: GWP-TEC Policy Brief 3: Gender mainstreaming: an essential component of sustainable water management

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Building a basic understanding of GESI among all team members

For there to be understanding and buy-in of the importance of applying a GESI lens throughout the project cycle, it is critical that all relevant team members know what gender and social inclusion is, why it is important to consider and what it means to apply a GESI lens. This will lay the foundation for ensuring that input from the GESI expert is valued and effectively integrated. Given the diversity of transboundary projects within CIWA, this may require providing foundational training or, more likely, coaching by a GESI expert at the kick-off phase that is tailored to the project's specific geographic and sectoral context. Depending on the nature of the project, it may also require training CIWA partners such as staff at a transboundary institution that CIWA supports or organizing awareness sessions with CIWA's local partners. For example, the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) and its partner the Nile Basin Discourse (NBD) have provided capacity-building tailored to diverse stakeholders ranging from senior NBI staff to volunteers with local civil society organizations to promote the importance of gender equality.

Conduct stakeholder mapping and engagement

Identifying and engaging with women's groups and organizations representing marginalized groups can provide a critical perspective when conceptualizing projects. Because they tend to be organized at the local, national and international levels and encompass diverse professional, religious, and political affiliations, these groups can provide a broad and in-depth perspective. The identification of stakeholders to consult should be as inclusive as possible to ensure that all people who should benefit are able to do so in an equitable manner. To be effective, interviews must be designed to elicit the views of women and other vulnerable populations. For example, as part of the process of gathering perspectives from local stakeholders about how they are affected by poor water quality in the Lake Victoria region, interviews were conducted with stakeholders working directly and indirectly on gender issues in the Great Lakes. In

addition to speaking to stakeholders operating at the Lake Victoria level, interviews were also conducted with staff at regional institutions such as the Lake Victoria Basin Commission and the East African Community to ensure that linkages were made about ways to address both the institutional and local level barriers to achieving gender equality.

Apply a gender and social inclusion lens in a systematic manner

Applying a GESI lens means systematically thinking through the complexity of a project and how GESI is relevant at every phase. This includes considering the perspective of beneficiaries, community leaders, policymakers, engineers and government officials. It requires taking the time to establish a baseline and overall narrative that articulates the why and how of gender mainstreaming that aligns to the complexity of the transboundary water context. It also requires devising indicators that can effectively measure change and finding ways to overcome the barriers to accessing gender disaggregated data so that results reflect the differences that women and men face in navigating transboundary water infrastructure and differences in the benefits that they derive. Applying an in-depth, broad-based approach to gender and social inclusion analysis can uncover the ways that gender norms are anchored in systems and institutions and how gender differences can influence societal values and norms. Applying a GESI lens can also reveal how power is distributed within systems at the micro, meso such as a community or organization or macro level. Because the application of a GESI lens can provide a more in-depth understanding of the populations involved with, or impacted by, a project, it can facilitate an understanding of the ways in which gender and social inclusion will affect outcomes and whether and how the intervention can facilitate positive changes in GESI norms and values.

Analyze gender using a diversity lens

Women and men are not homogeneous. For many women, their control over water and other natural resources is more complex because of their intersectional identities¹ such as marital status, socio-economic status, education or ethnic background. Because of obstacles linked to these identities, their valuable knowledge and expertise face even greater risks of being overlooked. It should therefore not be

¹ Intersectionality is a framework for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages. It takes into account people's overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices they face. <https://www.ywbboston.org/2017/03/what-is-intersectionality-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-me/>

assumed that the appointment of women to senior positions in water governance will trickle down to affect access to safe water and sanitation for women who are poor and illiterate.²

Differences in income, education, age and factors such as ethnicity need to be considered when analyzing the gender context to determine the most appropriate interventions. The stakeholder mapping process should develop a list of marginalized populations and document the specific vulnerabilities they face.

Do not forget men

It is important to remember that the water sector is male-dominated, which can result in decisions that ignore gender considerations and needs. Although there is increasing recognition that women should be involved in transboundary water management, in reality the sector often excludes them because of the masculine nature of the water management community³. Activities like building infrastructure or negotiating treaties tend to be assigned to men because they are considered more difficult, technical and important. In contrast, activities like community engagement or behavior change are traditionally seen as the role of women because they are considered to be simpler and less important and involve soft skills⁴. While targeted interventions can lead to greater empowerment for women and other marginalized groups, these changes can also lead people with more power in the hierarchy – principally men - to perpetrate physical or emotional violence because of the perception that they are losing power. Understanding these gendered dynamics as well as interrogating the gendered assumptions can help determine how to plan, prioritize and fund transboundary water initiatives that factor in the potential for male resistance to changing gender norms. And just as women should not be generalized, it should not be assumed that the attitudes and behavior of men are universal. It is therefore important to identify male champions who can contribute to changing gender norms and behaviors and broadening the understanding of how the exclusion of women also harms men.

Anticipate the need to build capacity on gender equality and social inclusion

In most countries, capacity in gender mainstreaming is limited because of its dependency upon donor funding. It therefore tends to occur in an ad-hoc manner and is frequently insufficient to facilitate an understanding of why and how to apply a GESI lens. In addition to planning and budgeting to build the capacity of stakeholders working in the water sector, other relevant sectors associated with the project should be educated about why, how and where to apply a GESI lens. If interventions are taking place within a transboundary or related institution, capacity-building should be adapted to address governance issues such as roles and responsibilities and how approaches should accommodate the participation and employment of women and other vulnerable populations⁵.

Leverage national and regional commitments to gender equality

Regional and national gender policies and protocols in the water sector can assist in promoting gender mainstreaming in water governance at the national level and in holding governments accountable to their gender equality commitments. Regional protocols, such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) gender strategy and the Southern African Development Community gender policy and strategy, have helped promote and implement gender mainstreaming in national governments and the national water sectors. The gender directorates and research networks that support them offer another layer of accountability that can be leveraged to foster the application of a GESI lens⁶.

Consider GESI at all levels and relevant issues

Gender and social inclusion are frequently relegated to a sub-sector or a separate section of project documents even though women and vulnerable populations frequently face many challenges that require targeted interventions throughout the project.

² Salo, E. *Gender and Water Policies in Africa: Synthesis Report*, Water Research Commission

³ Earle, Anton and Bazilli, Susan. "A gendered critique of transboundary water management" February 6, 2013, Feminist Review.

⁴ Baczewski, K. "From the Source: A framework for understanding the intersection of gender and water, Transboundary Waters Practitioner Briefing Series, MEDRC, Geneva Water Hub.

⁵ Salo, E. *Gender and Water Policies in Africa: Synthesis Report*, Water Research Commission, SP 90/15

⁶ Salo, E. *Gender and Water Policies in Africa: Synthesis Report*, Water Research Commission, SP 90/15

Even when gender is considered, the focus tends to be on individual struggles of poor and disenfranchised women. In the water field, this means the focus tends to be on issues such as women's unequal burden gathering water or their specific sanitation and hygiene needs. In the case of transboundary water resource management, it is important to note that gender has implications that go beyond these circumstances. The application of a GESI lens needs to consider relationships, communities and institutions at all levels and across all relevant sectors to identify obstacles to participation. For example, interviews conducted to develop the Conference Paper on Gender in the Nile uncovered instances when women were assigned secretarial roles at NBI meetings or given portfolios related to gender differences such as menstrual health.

Apply a GESI lens within the context of cross-cutting issues

Since water should be appreciated not only as an end in itself but also as a springboard to development, a GESI lens should be applied across sectors and issues of relevance to the project. It may also be necessary to work in partnership with the countries and organizations involved in other goals such as food security, risk management, energy, health, education and conservation to ensure that GESI considerations

are taken into account. An issue particularly relevant to CIWA is Fragility, Conflict and Violence (FCV) since many transboundary water basins are in countries affected by FCV. The Great Lakes ASA therefore sought to unpack how gender and FCV coincide within the context of Lake Victoria. Climate change and its impact on food security and livelihoods are also cross-cutting issues where the application of a GESI lens is relevant to CIWA's work. In addition to exploring the link between gender and irrigation, the ASA for CIWA's Sahel Groundwater Initiative cites linkages with climate change and food insecurity.

Look for ways to develop targeted interventions

While applying a GESI lens throughout the project cycle is essential, it is also valuable to look for opportunities to undertake stand-alone interventions aimed at addressing gender barriers that impede the full and meaningful participation of women and other vulnerable populations. For example, the Concept Note for CIWA's Sahel Groundwater Initiative has not only integrated the findings from the GESI analysis but also devised an explicit activity to address GESI. (see below). The NBI also leveraged an expansion of opportunities for women through its support of the NBD Forum in partnership with NBD.



How gender equality and social inclusion approaches inform CIWA projects: concrete examples

By encouraging countries to work together to share information, strengthen institutions and advance sustainable investments, CIWA enables a cooperative approach to manage shared risks and to distribute socio-economic benefits equitably. These efforts reduce resource-related conflict and strengthen regional integration for sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction and resilience to climate change.

CIWA achieves its goals by focusing on its three I's as articulated in the examples below:



The infographic is a vertical teal bar with a diagonal line pattern. It contains three circular icons at the top, each corresponding to a bullet point below. The first icon is a blue money bag with a white dollar sign. The second icon is a white classical building with four columns. The third icon is a white document with a folded corner. Each icon is set against a teal circular background.

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■ **INFORMATION**
to understand risks,
better decision making,
and monitor compliance
- 

■ **INSTITUTIONS**
to build trust, coordinate
planning, and manage
shared resources
- 

■ **INVESTMENT**
to manage watersheds,
manage groundwater, build
storage, among others

A. Information

Understanding the context in which a project or program will be developed requires conducting in-depth research and analysis including the perspective of gender and social inclusion. For example, as part of its efforts to understand how poor water quality impacts the local population in the Lake Victoria region, CIWA's Great Lakes Water Quality project included a broad analysis of socio-economic indicators and scientific and project literature on gender and social inclusion, particularly regarding livelihoods, including fishing, agriculture and private enterprise. Consideration was also given to the FCV context and its GESI implications. The findings were then validated by interviews with women's organizations and representatives from sectors of relevance to the project. To ensure that the institutional perspective was captured, interviews were conducted with the Lake Victoria Basin Commission and the East African Community to understand how these institutions have the potential to facilitate the integration of gender considerations across the countries that each represents. Steps were also taken to map and document specific vulnerable populations to consider how they are affected by poor water quality. To reinforce and complement the findings, a secondary literature review was conducted to gather specific examples at both the project and institutional level. Now that the Great Lakes ASA Concept Note has been approved, proposals are being developed to secure funding that will include GESI considerations.

The approach taken for CIWA's Sahel Groundwater Initiative was similar, including conducting an extensive secondary literature review and reaching out to individuals and organizations to shed light on the conditions for women and other vulnerable populations. This included contacting regional institutions from government and civil society and individuals and organizations working at the local level. To support planned stand-alone efforts targeted at increasing the number of local female hydrogeologists in the field, an extensive review of barriers and opportunities, including a specific focus on Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) programs that could be accessed, was developed. In anticipation of this targeted focus on women as potential hydrogeologists, a list of women who could form part of an Advisory Committee to advise the gender dimensions of further projects was also identified. Consulting firms contracted to do additional research and analysis in the areas of irrigation and groundwater education have also sought to ensure that GESI

considerations are integrated, including through the engagement of Gender experts who conducted field consultations with end-users.

B. Institutions

Institutional strengthening and improving sustainability are cornerstones upon which the trust-building interactions between countries take place. Many CIWA projects have activities that improve the technical capacity, services, systems and policies of transboundary institutions. The Great Lakes Water Quality project considered the capacity and commitment of regional institutions to mainstream GESI, including the Lake Victoria Basin Commission and the East African Community. The SADC Groundwater Management Initiative considered institutional commitments of project implementing partners including the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development and documents highlighting gender commitments from the river commissions working in Southern Africa. This included highlighting the Limpopo Watercourse Commission (LIMCOM)'s focus on gender and water on its web page and the Zambezi Watercourse Commission (ZAMCOM)'s commitment to gender mainstreaming in marginalized communities. Analysis also acknowledged the importance of considering capacity limitations since there can be a disconnect between written commitments and what is applied on the ground. This can be connected to fundamental barriers including a lack of knowledge on how to apply a GESI lens, limited financial resources allocated to gender equality and an inability to move commitments to implementation.

Another example that is more advanced in the project cycle can be taken from the Nile Basin Initiative which was supported through the CIWA-funded projects, Nile Cooperation for Results (NCORE, 2011 to 2020), and the new Nile Cooperation for Climate Resilience project (NCCR, which launched in 2021). Through NCORE, the NBI utilized training and consultations to disseminate expertise on flood and drought forecasting, dam safety and many other water resource management topics to their stakeholders. Throughout this process, NCORE promoted the explicit inclusion of women, such as through the Eastern Nile intern and young professional programs and attendance at technical conferences. During preparation of the follow-on project, NCCR, the NBI performed an internal assessment of its performance with respect to its 2012 Gender Mainstreaming Policy and incorporated recommendations for institutional reforms into the revised Policy that would seek to improve gender-sensitive workplace and employment

conditions. At the local level, NBD held a meeting of gender-based organizations in the Basin, which served as a basis for shaping the future work of mainstreaming gender. Many of NBD's more than 600 affiliate civil society organizations are now recognizing gender equality as part of their work.

C. Investments

Many of CIWA's projects include pre-feasibility studies or other aspects of investment preparation. Two major openings for advancing gender equality are to explicitly involve women and women's groups in civil society stakeholder consultations (as best practice in the World Bank's Environmental and Social Framework) and to develop specific solutions for women in Resettlement Action Plans. As part of its process to identify potential investment options, the Great Lakes Water Quality project targeted women's organizations to consider their perspective and to gather information on specific obstacles that could prevent women and other vulnerable populations from benefiting from a CIWA-funded project. The Sahel Groundwater Initiative also considered the gender perspective for potential irrigation investments including by conducting consultations with organizations such as women's cooperatives directly involved with agricultural production. The Nile Basin projects have several examples of the Nile Equatorial Lakes Subsidiary Action Plan Coordination Unit utilizing its strategic partnership with the NBD to expand stakeholder consultations to include women leaders from civil society and to explicitly address women's livelihoods (via the Livelihoods Restoration Program) during resettlement such as for the Regional Rusumo Falls Hydroelectric Project (for details see the No 7, April 2019 issue of [NELSAP News](#)) and in several feasibility studies.



Conclusion

Applying a GESI lens at the early phase of a project may seem time-consuming and require the allocation of additional financial and technical resources. However, an early investment in time and resources can lead to cost savings as well as the enhancement of project results over the longer term. While the engagement of GESI expertise is usually a critical point of departure, it is equally important that Project Team Leads and other relevant players have the commitment and understanding of the importance of applying a GESI lens to ensure that recommendations by the GESI expert are integrated in key places throughout the concept document. CIWA's commitment to applying a GESI lens throughout the project cycle has been enhanced at the early project preparation phase because of its concerted effort to ensure that gender and social inclusion considerations are integrated throughout the project preparatory documents and to identify the possibility of stand-alone interventions.

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The Cooperation in International Waters in Africa (CIWA), a multi-donor partnership, continues to support riparian governments in Sub-Saharan Africa and their path toward more sustainable, data-driven, community-focused, and collaborative management of transboundary waters.

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