

# Handbook on Mainstreaming Gender into the MRC's Core Functions and Activities

A guidebook for a gender-responsive and  
resilient Lower Mekong River Basin

*The Mekong River Commission (MRC) is funded by contributions from its Member Countries and Development Partners, including Australia, the European Union, Finland, Flanders/Belgium, France, Germany, Japan, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United States of America.*



# **Handbook on Mainstreaming Gender into the MRC's Core Functions and Activities**

A guidebook for a gender-responsive and  
resilient Lower Mekong River Basin

January 2023

**Copyright © Mekong River Commission, 2022**

First published (2022)

Some rights reserved.

This work is a product of the Mekong River Commission (MRC) Secretariat. While all efforts have been made to present accurate information, the MRC does not guarantee the accuracy of the data included in this work. The boundaries, colours, denomination, and other information shown on any map in this work do not imply any judgment on the part of the MRC concerning the legal status of any territory or the endorsement or acceptance of such boundaries.

Nothing herein shall constitute or be considered to be a limitation upon or waiver of the privileges and immunities of the MRC, all of which are specifically reserved.

This publication may be reproduced, in whole or in part and in any form, for educational or non-profit purposes without special permission from the copyright holder provided that the MRC is acknowledged as the source and that notification is sent to the MRC. The MRC Secretariat would appreciate receiving a copy of any publication that uses this publication as a source. This publication cannot be used for sale or for any other commercial purpose whatsoever without permission in writing from the MRC Secretariat.

**Title:** Handbook on mainstreaming gender into the Mekong River Commission's core functions and activities: A guidebook for a gender-responsive and resilient Lower Mekong River Basin

Doi: [10.52107/mrc.ajutqn](https://doi.org/10.52107/mrc.ajutqn)

**Keywords:** gender mainstreaming/gender guidebook/MRC/Lower Mekong River Basin

For bibliographic purposes, this volume may be cited as:

Mekong River Commission. (2022). *Handbook on mainstreaming gender into the Mekong River Commission's core functions and activities: A guidebook for a gender-responsive and resilient Lower Mekong River Basin*. Vientiane: MRC Secretariat.

DOI: [10.52107/mrc.ajutqn](https://doi.org/10.52107/mrc.ajutqn)

**All queries on rights and licences should be addressed to:**

Mekong River Commission  
Documentation and Learning Centre

184 Fa Ngoum Road, Unit 18, Ban Sithane Neua, Sikhottabong District,  
Vientiane 01000, Lao PDR, Telephone: +856-21 263 263  
E-mail: [mrcs@mrcmekong.org](mailto:mrcs@mrcmekong.org) | [www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org)

## Citation

Mekong River Commission. (2022). *Handbook on mainstreaming gender into the Mekong River Commission's core functions and activities: A guidebook for a gender-responsive and resilient Lower Mekong River Basin*. Vientiane: MRC Secretariat. DOI: [10.52107/mrc.ajutqn](https://doi.org/10.52107/mrc.ajutqn)

## Author

### ***Management***

Mr Santi Barann, Chief Strategy and Partnership Officer

### ***MRC Secretariat's technical expert***

Mr Sopheak Meas, Stakeholder Engagement Specialist

### ***International expert***

Ms Sandra Bode, Gender and Vulnerability Specialist



## FOREWORD

As we often say, the Mekong River “belongs to us all.” That means we should each feel a sense of ownership of, and responsibility to, safeguard a waterway that is the lifeblood of Southeast Asia, regardless of our nationality, ethnicity, religion – or gender.

This also means that not only do we all have a right to benefit equitably from development of the river’s water resources, but no category or community of people should suffer hardships disproportionately – whether the cause is that same development or the impact of climate change, in the form of increasingly severe droughts and floods.

We at the Mekong River Commission are involved with all aspects of the water sector, including the issue of equality. Just as we believe that everyone should have equal access to water, we also need equal access to information about that water.

For too long, though, we haven’t done enough to ensure that women in the Lower Mekong River Basin are provided equal access to both water and related information. Without such consideration, that doesn’t just mean inequity, unfairness or deprivation for women; it may also lead to their greater vulnerability.

During a disaster, for example, women and men may experience it with different degrees of vulnerability. Women can miss the early warning systems, as they are traditionally homebound, caring for their family members. This may reduce their disaster preparedness and response times – and increase their chances of being in harm’s way.

On the flip side, though, gender equality does more than reduce vulnerability when challenges arise; we hope it also means greater resilience. That helps to explain our motivation behind creating this publication: the MRC's first-ever Handbook on Gender Mainstreaming.

This Handbook isn't aimed at a wide audience, of course. Instead, it's primarily a technical tool for the MRC Secretariat staff, as well as for our four Member Countries and their line agencies, to ensure that gender is considered seriously when performing our functions and activities. That said, this Handbook is also available to any other organization that seeks guidance on how to be more gender inclusive with their strategies and projects, as it offers a list of key questions to consider.

More broadly speaking, we recognize that gender-equity momentum is growing today, as the issue itself has gone mainstream. Access to Water and Gender equality represent two of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. For our Member Countries, as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), gender mainstreaming has emerged as a policy priority.

At the same time, the MRC acknowledges gaps in our data: In years past, we haven't traditionally collected information based on gender, nor considered the meaningful participation of women when planning new strategies or projects. We are rectifying this.

Mainstreaming gender considerations should place both men and women, and their specific or even distinct vulnerabilities, at the center of our activities, so that any MRC intervention will directly assist or benefit both.

As we deepen these equity efforts, we hope that gender mainstreaming will not only make the Mekong a more inclusive region, but a more resilient one, too.



**Anoulak Kittkhoun**  
Chief Executive Officer  
MRC Secretariat



# CONTENTS

Background.....	1
Milestones of Gender and Vulnerability Mainstreaming.....	3
Purpose and users of this handbook.....	5
Key Gender Terminology.....	7
Gender and Vulnerability in the MRC context	7
Guiding Principles of MRC's Gender Mainstreaming.....	13
Mainstreaming planning support and processes.....	17
Mainstreaming data, monitoring and forecasting .....	25
Mainstreaming stakeholder engagement and communication .....	33
Strengthening MRC's Organisational Mainstreamin ..	39
Resources used in this working aid and additional useful sources.....	45



## ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BDS	Basin Development Strategy
CSO	Civil society organization
DAGAP	Data Acquisition and Generation Action Plan
G&V	Gender and vulnerability
GAP	Gender Action Plan
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
LGBTIAQ+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and asexual
MRC	Mekong River Commission
MRC-SP	Mekong River Commission Strategic Plan
NMC	National Mekong Committee
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
UNISDR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WHO	World Health Organization





## BACKGROUND

---

---

All basin countries have made significant progress in the last decade regarding social development and gender equality: access to health and education has improved; more women work in technical and formal professions; and national policies and laws were introduced to address different aspects of discrimination. Indeed, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community stresses the importance of a resilient community and the systematic reduction of vulnerability and inequality.

However, there are still substantial gaps and inequities that urgently require concentrated actions. The Mekong River Commission (MRC) recognizes that

sustainable development in the Basin depends on social equity and the resilience of the basin population, and that economic development as well as targeted policies and actions will be necessary to address inequity. The prior analytical work of the MRC and other stakeholders has proven that women and men contribute to water resources development, usually with different roles of equally important value. Nevertheless, women's voices are still under-represented in resource management and decision-making. The incomplete gender-and vulnerability-relevant data in the Basin further suggest that women earn lower wages than men in water-related sectors, and have less power over, and smaller benefits from, the resources to which they contribute.

The dimensions of vulnerability – economic situation, education, disability, language abilities, access to means of communication, age, different life stages, among many others have a significant impact on the resilience of people living in the Basin, and must be considered in the design, implementation, and evaluation of every action aimed at a truly sustainable basin development. However, disaggregated data are still difficult to attain, and existing data are often not linked effectively and in a timely manner with decision-making processes and budget allocations. The basin community must therefore urgently address this multi-dimensional data gap.

The current MRC strategy, therefore, leads with a gender and vulnerability (G&V) approach to account for intersectional inequity and the different dimensions of vulnerability.



## **MILESTONES OF GENDER AND VULNERABILITY MAINSTREAMING**

---

---

The MRC has been active in promoting gender equality and equity in the Basin. For more than two decades, the intergovernmental organization has worked to increase both equality and equity among the river basin populations, acknowledging that sustainable water governance is intrinsically intertwined with equitable development and equal participation of the people who depend on the rivers' resources, directly and indirectly.

Over time, the MRC has progressively mainstreamed its organizational structures, guidelines, strategies and policies to fine-tune its work and promote equity among the riparian populations. Some milestones of these efforts include:

- The development of a strong foundation for mainstreaming with a Gender Strategy and Policy in 2000;
- strengthening of the technical capacity and accountability system for gender mainstreaming in the MRC's technical work;
- institutionalization of gender monitoring at the MRC's events, consultations and meetings;
- integration of a gender and vulnerability perspective into the Basin Development Strategies (BDS) and the MRC-SP;
- the establishment of an approved Gender Action Plan;
- the development of gender-specific activities, tasks, and budget as part of Multi-Year Work Plans;
- preparation of a gender and vulnerability (G&V) report related to water resources development in the Lower Mekong River Basin in 2021;
- development of a sex-disaggregated, socio-economic data collection method to develop a more detailed gender perspective for the State of Basin Report (SOBR) 2023.

The development of this Handbook on Mainstreaming Gender into the Mekong River Commission's Core Functions and Activities: A guidebook for a gender-responsive and resilient Lower Mekong River Basin (the "Handbook") is the latest step that the MRC has taken to mainstream its technical work to a larger context, based on a G&V-responsive approach.

In the development of the BDS 2021–2030, G&V elements have been given particular attention. As a result, G&V aspects can now be found in every chapter of the BDS, and the MRC-SP aims at enhancing disaggregated information and the integration of equality aspects to contribute to a just and equitable social development for the riparian communities. This is in line with the ASEAN vision for a resilient and thriving community, and reflects the significance G&V has received in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The overall lack of disaggregated data was highlighted as one key area of action, because in order to design specific measures at the MRC and Member Countries' levels, information on the status, challenges, and strengths of different population groups needs to be increased. This would allow to integrate equality aspects meaningfully, and contribute to a just and equitable social development for the riparian communities.

Key social issues that are repeatedly considered throughout the BDS are food security, G&V-responsive emergency management, and inequity of access and opportunities in regard to water resources, e.g. access to safe water, and inequality in paid and unpaid work. On this basis, the MRC-SP of the MRC includes both G&V-focused measures (e.g. an analysis of G&V aspects of basin water, food and energy security), and measures that put an additional emphasis on gender mainstreaming (e.g. the integration of vulnerability mapping into cooperative and spatial planning efforts). A Gender Action Plan (GAP) has been developed as accompanying document to the MRC-SP. The GAP can be found as an annex to the current MRC-SP, and monitoring of the activities are part of the annual reporting.



## PURPOSE AND USERS OF THIS HANDBOOK

---

The purpose of this Handbook is to assist the MRC to effectively integrate a gender perspective into all aspects of its work, from the development, update and application of strategic tools, procedures, normative guidelines, studies, and organizational strengthening, to designing and advocating for joint actions. The goal is to strengthen the MRC’s ability to promote an enabling and inclusive environment for all stakeholders and genders, so that the Mekong Basin population can both contribute to and benefit from the development and management of sustainable water resources. Ultimately, this should contribute and lead to sustainable and equitable development outcomes.

Primary users of the Handbook are the staff of the MRC Secretariat and officials from the four core Member Countries of the MRC, particularly technical staff seeking guidance for regularly mainstreaming G&V elements into their work. MRC leadership may use this handbook to inform strategic decisions for further mainstreaming needs and to ensure a unified approach to G&V-sensitive language and responsive action. Furthermore, water governance experts beyond the MRC may find this resource useful to guide their G&V mainstreaming efforts throughout different technical areas of water governance by adapting it to their own context and situation.

### **This Handbook will provide:**

---

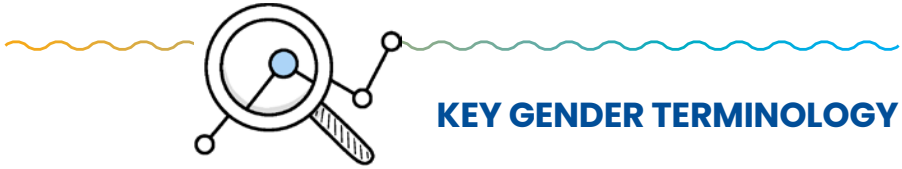
- an overview of gender terminology relevant to the MRC’s work;
- guiding principles for gender mainstreaming;
- guidance to mainstream gender into planning procedures and processes, with a focus on the update and development of basin-wide strategy and technical guidelines;
- guidance to mainstream gender into data, monitoring and forecasting;
- guidance to mainstream gender into stakeholder engagement and communication;

- guidance to strengthen the MRC’s organizational mainstreaming;
- additional useful references and literature links.

The Handbook is a supporting document to aid the effective integration of G&V elements into the MRC’s core activities. Hence, its use will not be monitored separately; rather, the MRC Secretariat staff and Member Countries are invited to view this Handbook as a living document to be developed during its application.







## KEY GENDER TERMINOLOGY

### *Gender and Vulnerability in the MRC context*

All basin countries have made significant progress within the last decade in regard to social development and gender equality. Access to health and education has improved, more women work in technical and formal professions, national policies and laws were introduced to fight different aspects of discrimination, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) community stresses the importance of a resilient community and the systematic reduction of vulnerability and inequality.

However, there are still substantial gaps and inequities, which urgently require concentrated action. The BDS recognizes that sustainable development in the Basin depends on social equity and the resilience of the basin population, and that economic development as well as targeted policies and actions will be necessary to address inequity.

The BDS therefore leads with a G&V approach to account for intersectional inequity and the different dimensions of vulnerability.

Lessons learned from prior analytical work of the MRC and other stakeholders indicate that women and men contribute to water resource development usually with different roles of equally important value, but women's voices are still underrepresented in resource management and decision-making.

The dimensions of vulnerability – economic situation, education, disability, language abilities, access to means of communication, age, different life stages, among many others – have a significant impact on the resilience of people living in the Basin, and must be taken into consideration in the design, implementation, and evaluation of every action aimed at a truly sustainable basin development. However, disaggregated data are still difficult to attain and existing data are often not linked effectively and in a timely manner with decision-making processes and budget allocations.

This multi-dimensional data gap needs urgent addressing by the basin community.

The MRC uses the following definitions when promoting a G&V approach, as shown below.

**GENDER**

According to World Health Organization (WHO), gender refers to the roles, behaviours, activities, attributes, and opportunities that any society considers appropriate for girls and boys, and women and men. Gender interacts with, but is different from, the binary categories of biological sex. <sup>1</sup> This understanding of gender is therefore socially constructed. Gender is increasingly understood as not binary, but rather, on a spectrum. Growing numbers of people are identifying as somewhere along a continuum between man and woman, or as non-gendered (neither man nor woman). This is referred to as gender identity. <sup>2</sup>

**SEX**

This refers to the biological aspects of an individual as determined by their anatomy. It is generally male or female – even though the factual biological diversity is not that binary <sup>3</sup> – and is assigned at birth.

**GENDER  
EQUALITY**

This refers to a lack of discrimination based on a person's sex in terms of accessing opportunities, allocating resources and benefits, or accessing services. <sup>4</sup> Gender equality occurs when people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Everyone is affected by gender inequality – women, men, trans and gender-diverse people, children, and families. It impacts people of all ages and backgrounds.

Gender equality is a human right, for which everyone benefits. <sup>5</sup>

---

1 See WHO (2020).

2 See, for example, the definition by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) of UK Government (2019).

3 To learn more about the gender spectrum, see Gender Spectrum (2019).

4 See WHO Europe (2020).

5 This is based on definition and examples on how gender inequality affects everyone, and how equality benefits everyone. See State Government of Victoria (SGV, 2019).

## **GENDER EQUITY**

This refers to the fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between the different genders. The concept recognizes that people of different genders have different needs and power, and that these differences should be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies the imbalance between them.<sup>6</sup> To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on level playing field. Equity leads to equality.<sup>7</sup>

## **GENDER MAINSTREAMING**

Mainstreaming gender is both a technical and a political process that requires shifts in organizational cultures and ways of thinking, as well as in the goals, structures and resource allocations. This also entails assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels. It is also a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres such that inequality between men and women is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

Mainstreaming requires changes at different levels within institutions, in agenda setting, policymaking, planning, implementation, and evaluation. Mainstreaming instruments include new staffing and budgeting practices, training programmes, policy procedures, and guidelines.<sup>8</sup>

Note: The common definitions of gender mainstreaming are binary (men-women). However, in the assessment and design of measures, the understanding of gender should be broader, according to the previous definitions, particularly to ensure additional, intersectional discrimination (see below), for example, of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and asexual (LGBTIAQ+) people.

<sup>6</sup> See WHO Europe (2020) for more information.

<sup>7</sup> See UNFPA (2005).

<sup>8</sup> WHO Europe (2020).

## **INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION**

Intersectional discrimination is based on personal grounds or characteristics/identities that operate and interact with each other at the same time in such a way as to be inseparable.<sup>9</sup> A person who is discriminated against on the grounds of their race might also suffer discrimination on the grounds of their gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, age or disability. This discrimination can create cumulative disadvantage.<sup>10</sup> In the Mekong riparian states, it is therefore possible to observe heightened barriers for ethnic minority women, older women, disabled women, and men of different ages, LGBTIAQ+ people of different ages, or younger ethnic minority members.

## **GENDER-SENSITIVE VS. RESPONSIVENESS**

To identify and understand gender gaps and biases, and then act on them, it is necessary to develop and implement actions to overcome challenges and barriers, thereby improving gender equality. In comparison to gender-sensitive (understanding and considering socio-cultural factors underlying sex-based discrimination), gender responsiveness has come to mean more than 'doing no harm'; it now means 'to do better'. A gender-responsive approach is therefore more proactive, allocates resources for gender analysis, and adopts a strategic approach to implement measures addressing the identified barriers, for example, by advancing women's and girls' employment via enhanced access to and control of resources and services, benefits, participation, and decision-making. This approach helps ensure that the MRC's policies, programmes or projects do not exacerbate inequalities. but rather, take meaningful steps to reduce disparities and empower women, girls, and members of traditionally disadvantaged groups.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> See European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2020a) on intersectional discrimination, for greater details.

<sup>10</sup> European Commission (EU, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Based on IUCN definitions. See IUCN (2018) for more details.

## GENDER BUDGETING

Gender budgeting is an application of gender mainstreaming in the budgetary process. It involves conducting a gender-based assessment of budgets, incorporating a gender perspective at all levels of the budgetary process, and restructuring revenues and expenditures in order to promote gender equality. In short, gender budgeting is a strategy and a process with the long-term aim of achieving gender equality goals.

Gender budgeting aims to include the lived realities of women's and men's lives in budgets, and to highlight existing inequalities visible in budgeting. In practice, gender budgeting reveals the different impacts of spending and revenue decisions on women and men, which differ depending on their life stages, and economic and social circumstances. In addition, this requires reviewing public finance decisions to ensure that they contribute to advancing gender equality, rather than reinforcing existing inequalities.

### Gender statistics (sex-disaggregated data/ gender-disaggregated data)

Gender statistics adequately reflect differences and inequalities in the situation of women and men in all areas of life. They are defined by the following characteristics:

- data are collected and presented by sex as a primary and overall classification (sex-disaggregated data);
- data reflect gender issues;
- data are based on concepts and definitions that adequately reflect the diversity of women and men, and capture all aspects of their lives;
- data collection methods take into account stereotypes and social and cultural factors that may induce gender bias in the data.<sup>12</sup>

*Note:* This does not reduce statistics automatically to a binary male/female approach, but rather suggests that gender and vulnerability need to be put into context by considering: **what kind of information do we need in order to understand people's challenges and opportunities fully?**

<sup>12</sup> UNSTATS (2015) provides a good explanation of the meaning of gender statistics, and why 'gender-disaggregated data' is actually a misleading term.

---

**Gender indicator**

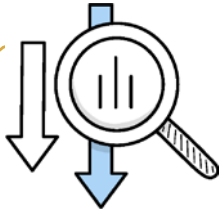
The term 'gender-disaggregated data' is misleading because it mostly describes an approach to collecting simply 'sex-disaggregated' data. Collecting data based on biological sex ('sex-disaggregated') is, however, just one aspect of gender statistics. To understand the different roles, opportunities and barriers of people of all genders, it is necessary to go further than that and attempt to understand systems of power and structural barriers to inclusive water governance and access to resources.

For example, collecting data on how many women and men are directly dependent on Mekong resources is simple sex-disaggregated data collection. Collecting gender data, in contrast, would additionally include the factors that differentiate 'dependency' further (i.e. 'intersectional data analysis'), such as age, intra-community status, economic status, educational attainment, ethnicity, gender identity, disability and any other factor that might influence a person's ability to be an active contributor to water governance and benefit equitably from water resources. Gender data are therefore strongly driven by context and disaggregation needs. Generally, this rule can be followed: If the aim is to reach the people with the highest accumulation of intersectional barriers, no one is left behind.

Meaningful gender indicators consider the above-mentioned dimensions. Again, context is decisive for formulating effective indicators: how do we measure change for different groups of people in a way that shows that a policy, strategy or activity is effective? In addition to quantitative indicators (based on statistics broken down by sex), there may be qualitative indicators (based on women's and men's experiences, attitudes, opinions, and feelings). Gender-sensitive indicators allow for the measurement of changes in the relations between women and men in a certain policy area, programme or activity, as well as changes in the status or situation of women and men.

Again, if a binary approach (women/men) is not capturing a change sufficiently, it is necessary to include the dimension 'gender identity' in monitoring and evaluation.

---



## GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF MRC'S GENDER MAINSTREAMING

---

The guiding principles mentioned in the MRC's Gender Policy document<sup>13</sup> are:

- Gender equity and equality are considered an integral part of all MRC work and activities.
- Effectiveness and efficiency in achieving development goals require the recognition that every MRC activity affects women and men differently, and that their different perspectives, needs, interests, roles, and resources should be taken into account at every stage.
- Gender equity and equality are fundamental values that must be strengthened and reflected in development choices and institutional practices.

The MRC leadership and management is committed to promote gender equality proactively both within the organization and throughout the MRC's work.

This is coherent with international and regional commitments to fostering gender equality:

- the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs),<sup>14</sup> particularly targets 5.5 (women's participation and leadership), 5c (policies to promote gender equality and women empowerment), 8.5 (full and productive employment and equal pay), 10.2 (Promote inclusiveness), 6.1 (equitable access to water) and 6.b (participation of local

---

<sup>13</sup> See MRC (2013).

<sup>14</sup> All SDGs: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (n.d.).

communities in water management);

- the **Dublin–Rio Principles on Integrated Water Resource Management**:<sup>15</sup> Principle 2 (Participatory approach: water development and management should be based on a participatory approach, involving users, planners and policy makers on all levels), and Principle 3 (Role of women: women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water);
- the **ASEAN Socio–Cultural Community Blueprint 2025**:<sup>16</sup> Reduction of vulnerabilities, inequities and inequality including on the basis of gender, equitable access to resources, and the promotion of community engagement in environmental management and protection.

Hence, the MRC is committed to a proactive gender–responsive approach. This includes conducting detailed analysis on the circumstances and needs of different population groups in the Mekong Basin, the implications of gender and vulnerability on the design and implementation of supported measures, and the effects of measures on different population groups. Analysis and data collection will focus mainly on identifying inequity of women and men in different circumstances in terms of their access to/benefit from water–related resources.

Gender mainstreaming has multiple dimensions, most of which are covered in this working aid and the current Gender Action Plan as part of the BDS and the MRC–SP. This working aid will cover most of the dimensions according to the MRC’s core work areas. The figure below presents an overview of the dimensions of gender mainstreaming.<sup>17</sup>

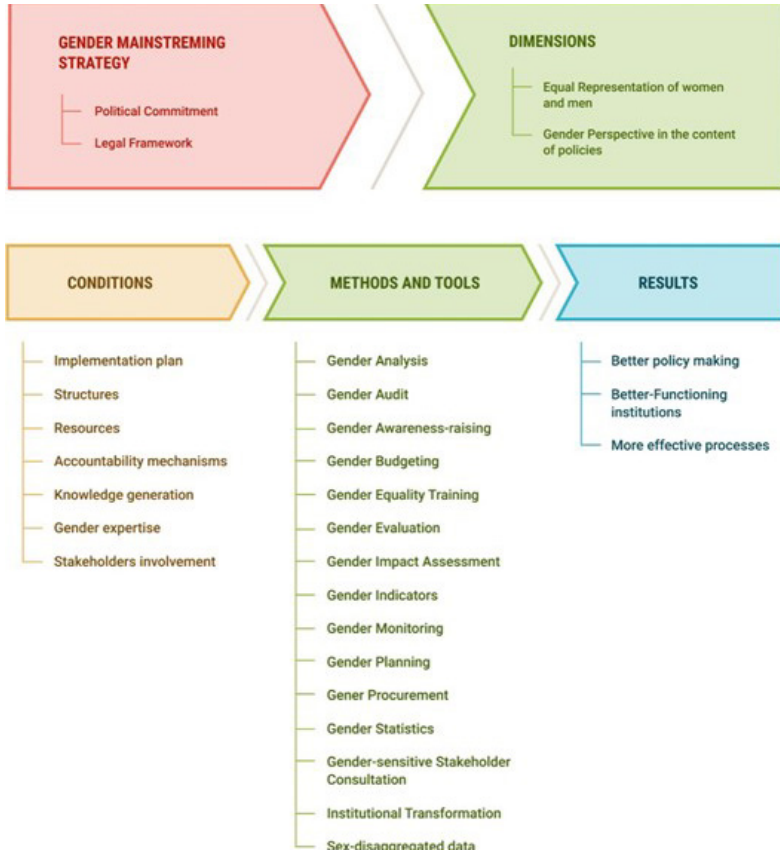
---

<sup>15</sup> Global Water Partnership (GWP, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> See ASEAN (2016).

<sup>17</sup> Extracted from EIGE (2020b) on the definition of gender mainstreaming

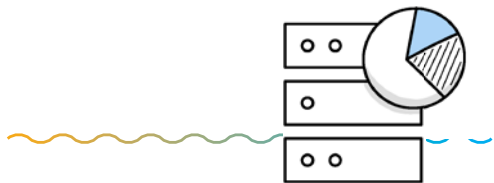




### Overview of how gender is mainstreamed

*Note:* Gender equality is not equivalent to gender parity. Promoting equal representation of women and men in the MRC does not, therefore, refer to achieving a 50/50 proportion of female and male staff, but rather, encourages the leadership to promote equal opportunities at the management level, balanced promotion opportunities, and mechanisms for participation and decision-making





## **MAINSTREAMING PLANNING SUPPORT AND PROCESSES**

---

---

This chapter provides general guidance to mainstream gender and vulnerability elements into planning procedures and processes with a focus on updating and developing basin-wide strategies and technical guidelines.

- Integrated regional planning, regional sectoral strategies, the creation and evaluation of alternative development scenarios, and the preparation of a basin-wide sediment management plan. The

process involves identifying new joint investment projects and national projects of basin-wide significance that could increase synergies and reduce trade-offs and vulnerabilities at both the basin and national levels, and provide a comprehensive response to climate change and related flood and drought challenges (e.g. upstream multi-purpose storage development, downstream floodwater management, and water utilization).

- Best Practice Guidelines and guidance on how existing and impending national and joint projects and programmes should be carried out to minimize potential transboundary impacts and risks.
- The review and update of MRC Procedures – focus in this strategy period: the Procedures for Maintenance of Flow on the Mainstream (PMFM) and the Procedures for Water Quality (PWQ).



## Gender mainstreaming guidance and tools:

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
<b>Review of the MRC Procedures and technical guidelines</b>	<p>Does the current procedure sufficiently consider impacts of, for example, water quality, water flow, fisheries, on the social conditions and on women and men's vulnerability?</p>	<p><b>Review and adaptation of the methods, tools and language</b> used to ensure that the procedure/strategy covers social impact, including gendered differences (e.g. how water quality affects women's and men's health or time burden differently). The review is usually conducted with a desk review; where MRC data are not available, experiences from other basins might be. When no data are available, data collection/analysis should be initiated as part of the update/design process.</p>
	<p>Do we have sufficient sex-disaggregated data and gender statistics to update and monitor the procedure accordingly?</p>	<p><b>Data gap identification and review of possibilities</b> to gather needed data. Effectively link results from other activities (from the assessment of change limits for environmental assets, the G&amp;V analysis, the G&amp;V data collection and vulnerability mapping, and the decision support system). To be able to assess vulnerability and impact, the following information is necessary: whom is affected and how? Who contributes and in what way? The specifics vary according to topic.</p>
	<p>How do we engage different population groups?</p>	<p><b>Review existing and planned community engagement mechanisms and identify efficient linkages</b> (e.g. participation of civil society organizations (CSOs) in the Regional Stakeholder Forum to represent local voices regarding changes in water flow and quality).  <b>Update notification and management actions</b> to ensure the timely communication with affected communities in case of emergencies or crucial changes affecting their livelihoods. (see pp. 24 for details on stakeholder communication).</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
---------	----------------	---------------

**Guideline development/ update and guidance for national or joint projects, management plans, and regional sectoral plans and strategies**

What do we know about the impact of xx (guideline focus/project, e.g. data collection methods of Joint Environmental Monitoring) on women and men in the affected areas; what do we know about their contribution to xx (e.g. water quality monitoring)?

**Review and incorporation** of existing sex-disaggregated data and gender information relevant to the specific topic (case studies, census data, development partner reports). The planned analyses and studies (G&V study, environmental assets analysis, vulnerability mapping) should generate significantly more data in the upcoming years. The lens should both include vulnerabilities and opportunities, e.g. who are potential change agents to initiate change in the long term?

What information is missing in order to assess the potential impact on women and men in the affected areas? If Mekong-relevant data are not available, are there best practices/ experiences from other basins/ RBOs (river basin organizations)? If it is necessary to generate data. Who should do, how, and at what cost?

**Addressing data gaps:**

**Request an analysis** by Member Countries, externals (local CSOs, consultants), or development partners.

**MRC surveys** using internal networks (e.g. civil society organizations active in regional stakeholder forums, or targeted information sessions in these forums).

If data are needed during an emergency, funds could be drawn from the planned **Mekong Fund mechanism** (e.g. rapid assessment of health impacts on communities after toxic spills).

If analysis is not possible, the G&V dimension should still be mentioned in the guidance to **draw awareness to the prevalent knowledge gaps and seek joint solutions**. Where existing, experiences and best practices from outside the Mekong region can be used to draw first assumptions on gender-differentiated impact of xx.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
	<p>How can we address gender inequities and vulnerability in xx (guideline, project design)?</p>	<p>Reducing inequity and vulnerability requires that we know the root causes of both. The availability of disaggregated data is therefore crucial to determine what action to take. However, some inequities and vulnerabilities can be assumed to be largely universal and need to be generally considered when providing guidance, e.g. women have generally less access to resources, assets, and benefits, and mostly carry a greater burden in paid and unpaid work. For example, droughts in developing countries bring health hazards through reduced availability of water for drinking, cooking and hygiene, and through food insecurity. Women and even girls (and their offspring) disproportionately suffer health consequences of nutritional deficiencies and the burdens associated with travelling long distances to collect water. In contrast, in both developed and developing countries, there is evidence that drought can disproportionately increase suicide rates among male farmers.<sup>18</sup> These gender-related impacts have to be addressed in guidelines and consultations with: (i) gender-sensitive risk mitigation/‘do no harm’ measures; and (ii) gender-responsive measures (e.g. advocacy to link joint drought projects with nutrition security projects and farmers’ improved access to rice banks/low-risk emergency credit schemes/alternative income sources to secure livelihoods).</p> <p>In assessing and designing these, it will be possible to identify change agents within the target group to support behavioural and social change.</p>

18 These examples are drawn from WHO (2014) Gender, Climate Change and Health.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
	<p>Who can implement the recommended measures, and how can they be financed?</p>	<p>In addition to content, any guidance also needs to <b>address responsibilities and resource options to ensure implementation of the recommended measures</b>. When the Joint Expert Working Groups are involved in the planning of projects/guidance measures, an <b>expert in G&amp;V/social impact</b> will be responsible for coordinating responsibilities and resources accordingly. The <b>national gender focal points</b> in the member states on ministry-level can be liaison persons to determine key persons/institutions within the countries to take the lead on specific measures.</p> <p>Often, projects are already active in the targeted area, so <b>coordination and exchange</b> can be facilitated.</p> <p><b>Given that gender-responsive budgeting</b> capacities are relatively low in most Member Countries, this MRC handbook advises that some measures may require mixed funding sources (e.g. national, development partners, or Mekong Fund).</p>
<p><b>Development of alternative development scenarios</b></p>	<p>What are the inequalities and vulnerabilities in the target group in current development scenarios?</p>	<p><b>G&amp;V-sensitive situation analysis:</b> Review and incorporate existing sex-disaggregated data and gender-relevant information. Particularly relevant is information on: the gendered division of labour in water resources-related activities; the barriers and constraints for women and men to accessing water resources and their benefits; and the potential change agents.</p> <p>Also, ensure the integration of information produced by other MRC activities (e.g. G&amp;V analysis, environmental assets limit analysis, vulnerability mapping).</p>



Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
	<p>How can we avoid perpetuating the identified inequalities and vulnerabilities (do no harm)? And what scenario would promote gender equality and reduce vulnerability (G&amp;V-responsive approach)?</p>	<p><b>A gender-disaggregated needs assessment and stakeholder analysis</b><sup>19</sup> can be conducted partly as a desk study and partly based on stakeholder consultations (Member Countries, CSO discussion during regional stakeholder forums, target group surveys if possible). The goal is to identify opportunities to promote equitable access to water resources and benefits of different population groups.</p> <p><b>Cost-benefit analyses</b> for the alternative scenarios should aim to include potential costs and/or lost benefits of social inequality as far as possible, and propose vulnerability-sensitive investment scenarios (e.g. vulnerability-responsive flood protection infrastructure planning).</p> <p>Key indicators for a cost and/or loss analysis that can be relevant to water resources and their benefits and management can be equity and equality in employment, decision-making, entrepreneurship, access to credit, educational attainment, and gender division of labour (paid and unpaid).<sup>20</sup></p>

19 A useful checklist for inclusive and equitable stakeholder engagement in water governance is available at OECD (2015), particularly on p. 174.

20 Useful indicators for measurement are available in a study by Ferrant & Kolev (2016), Wodon & de la Brière (2018), and EIGE (2016b).



NP CỬA HÀNG TRANG TRÍ NỘI THẤT  
**NHUẬN PHÁT**  
CHUYÊN BÁN GIÚP TẠM THỜI NHẬN TIỀN ĐÃ ĐƯỢC NHẬN VÀO NHẬN  
MANG MỌI MÓN TẶNG QUÀ ĐÓN TẾT 2012

mobifone  
**LÊN MẠNG  
KHÔNG  
GIỚI HẠN**  
SIM  
**Khia.com**  
LÊN MẠNG HẾT HỒN HỒ MẠNG



## MAINSTREAMING DATA, MONITORING AND FORECASTING

This chapter provides general guidance on how to integrate G&V aspects into data collection, monitoring and forecasting activities, and how disaggregated data can be utilized. The data focuses on the analysis of the livelihoods of the Mekong riparian population in regard to their accessibility to water-related resources and benefits.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
Study/ assessment design (e.g. sediment transport study, environmental assets limit assessment)	What do we know about impacts of xx (study/ assessment topic, e.g. sediment transport changes) on women and men in the respective communities? Who can we identify as change agents?	<p>Review of sex-disaggregated data and gender-relevant information (prioritizing data in the Mekong region, but experiences from other regions can be useful to determine data gaps and draw assumptions for our study).</p> <p>Determine core relevant information needed to integrate G&amp;V into the study design, as shown in the example of a sediment transport study. Relevant Information can include: the impact of sediment changes and bank erosion on women’s, men’s, girls’ and boys’ nutrition security, human health (e.g. affected by sediment pollution) and on income opportunities for women and men in the riparian communities (e.g. through impact of bank erosion on land use). The study can also identify change agents. For example, since women are generally responsible for family nutrition, a communication strategy might focus on reaching out to women to promote certain measures in their communities to prevent negative health impacts of the identified pollution. These targeted measures may create further opportunities for empowerment, e.g. by promoting the formation of women monitoring groups.</p> <p>Where direct information/consultation with affected communities seems significant (e.g. in the limits assessment for environmental assets), the study design needs to develop an effective engagement/consultation mechanism. Three examples (below) of such mechanisms (using the example of the limits assessment for environmental assets):</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
---------	----------------	---------------

- a) In regional stakeholder forums, a session should be included with community and CSO representatives from selected key regions (e.g. key wetlands areas) to collect local perspectives on limits of acceptable change.
- b) The MRC commissions local civil society organizations to conduct limits assessments in selected areas, including community interviews, and feeds the case study data into the overall assessment.
- c) The MRC advocates for each Member Country to conduct local discussion forums (e.g. through national or provincial parliamentarians who regularly conduct local constituency engagement forums) or to commission case studies (implemented by local government staff or CSOs).

The guiding questions for all three examples are: Who is affected, in what way, and by what change (here: of the affected environmental systems)? Who contributes and in what way (here: to the protection of the wetlands)? How are changes/non-changes exacerbating or perpetuating vulnerabilities and inequalities?

How can the information be utilized?

Each study/assessment should identify opportunities to reduce inequity and vulnerability among the target communities.

Here is an example of a sediment study, who aim is to identify the following opportunities: (i) to improve nutrition security for all community members; (ii) for alternative income to decrease dependence on water-related resources; and (iii) for community involvement measures to counteract erosion (possibly even with an empowerment element for women's community leadership promotion, e.g. promoting women's leadership in local erosion prevention committees).

By defining these factors, the social limits that prevent change/'do no harm' approaches and opportunities to promote equity and reduce vulnerability can be determined for different population groups.

The results of these analyses can also be used to inform cost/loss analyses for alternative development scenarios, vulnerability mapping activities, regional planning measures, sectoral strategies, and the identification and design of national and joint projects.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
<p><b>Vulnerability mapping</b></p>	<p>Which factors put women and men in the riparian communities in vulnerable positions?</p>	<p>The vulnerability mapping activities should aim to collect the following core information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the poor and near-poor communities in areas of key environmental (water-related) assets (e.g. based on national census data and GIS);</li> <li>• the regularity and severity of water-related disasters/ incidents events, and how they affect different population groups in terms of their water, food and energy security, health, income, and time poverty;</li> <li>• intersectional inequalities in communities (feeding directly into activity 2.1.4.3.; e.g. ethnic belonging, m/f secondary education rates, m/f employment sectors, m/f land ownership, m/f access to credit).</li> </ul>
	<p>Utilization of results: How can sectoral changes/ investments contribute to reduce their vulnerability?</p>	<p>The <b>layering</b> of these data will provide a detailed picture of the vulnerabilities and inequities among riparian communities. It will also provide the results of the mapping, which can be used to <b>inform both regional and national planning activities</b>. Some examples are the prioritization of flood-resistant infrastructure projects in areas of highest vulnerability; the identification of communities that have the greatest need for timely early warning communication; and inclusion of determined vulnerabilities into basin development scenarios).</p> <p>The data gaps that will be identified by the analysis should be used as basis to <b>advocate for harmonized data collection</b> with the NMCs (National Mekong Committees). Even if the results of the vulnerability mapping will not be available immediately, the <b>design of the decision support system</b> should already consider the systematic integration of some of the information to facilitate their incorporation once available. This design should <b>at least include data on poverty and employment sectors (gender-disaggregated, if available)</b>.</p> <p>The implementation of the Data Acquisition and Generation Action Plan (DAGAP), including the provision to the MRC of the social and economic data that countries already have, will be highly valuable in this regard.</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
<p><b>Harmonization of regional disaggregated data</b></p>	<p>What kind of data is needed in order to establish a baseline of gender statistics that we can feed into decision-making and different planning processes?</p>	<p>Even though it will be necessary to review and tailor data needs in every individual planning/design/implementation process, there are a few <b>common data baselines</b> that would significantly improve most processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty data (including near-poverty: particularly important under COVID-19 development lens), disaggregated by sex, age, location, ethnic groups.</li> <li>• Data on access to clean water, energy and food security, disaggregated by sex, age, location, and ethnic groups</li> <li>• Formal and informal employment data in relation to water resources, and in general for riparian communities, which is important to determine the potential to decrease communities' dependence on water resources, disaggregated by sex, age, educational attainment, location, and ethnic group.</li> </ul> <p>The systematic collection of these data will need to be <b>incorporated into National Indicative Plans (NIPs)</b> since they depend substantially on national actions to be implemented. Involving local civil society <b>organizations (CSOs) and development partners</b> can be a measure to support national agencies in the data collection activities. At the ASEAN level, it would be worthwhile to regularly crosscheck the availability of regional data, e.g. as collected by the ASEAN Committee on Women, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and/or Oxfam International.</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
<p><b>Improvement and integration of basin-wide flood and drought forecasting and early warning</b></p>	<p>What are the current communication channels with local communities potentially affected by floods and droughts, and what is the best way to utilize these channels best, both ways?</p>	<p><b>Review of current national communication channels with and from affected local communities:</b> How is accumulated local knowledge (e.g. on drought-related changes in agricultural outputs, sudden or continuous changes in water levels) captured and used (i.e. bottom-up information)? Which channels are used to inform affected communities (forecasting and early warning), and who exactly is reached by this communication?</p> <p>This is important as international experiences show that men and women access, process, interpret and respond to information in different ways due to the social and cultural organization of gender relations and the gender division of labour.<sup>21</sup></p>

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Brown et al. (2019) on gender transformative early warning systems.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
	<p>How can we design inclusive early warning communication mechanisms that are gender-sensitive?</p>	<p><b>Enhance early warning systems with gender-sensitive early warning communication mechanisms</b> that cover the following:<sup>22</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>Vulnerability risk knowledge:</b> Assessments need to include existing vulnerabilities and capacities specific to both women and men, and evaluate the risk faced by both groups considering differing social and economic roles and responsibilities.</li> <li>b) <b>Inclusive monitoring:</b> Systems that monitor, archive and disseminate data on key hazards and <b>vulnerabilities</b> include sex-disaggregated data and analysis of gender issues.</li> <li>c) The regional database mirrors this structure, uses sex-disaggregated data, and includes social and cultural commonalities and contrasts to aid planning for transboundary monitoring of hazards and vulnerabilities.</li> <li>d) <b>Dissemination of meaningful warnings to those at risk:</b> Warnings are formulated and disseminated while ensuring that they are adequately understood by all women, men, girls and boys at risk, and on a timely basis. Particular attention is paid to age, culture, literacy, information access and sociocultural context. Warning and evacuation systems include specific measures to reach women, ensuring to address any gendered cultural constraints on mobility and information access. Mobility constraints must also be considered for community members living with disabilities.</li> <li>e) <b>Response capability of communities:</b> Evaluation needs to show that women, men, girls and boys understand the hazards that the community faces, are alert to natural signs as well as formal early warning, and know how to respond.</li> </ul> <p>Preparedness plans and response capacities need to integrate gender analysis results and address the main gender-based differences in disaster preparedness and response.</p>

<sup>22</sup> Detailed guides to design gender-responsive early warning systems are available at UNISDR/UNDP/IUCN (2009). Also see Brown et al. (2019) for additional information on this subject.





## MAINSTREAMING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

This chapter provides general guidance on how to integrate gender-sensitive language and mainstreaming measures into stakeholder engagement and MRC communication mechanisms. It focuses only on the mechanisms that have not yet been covered under previous chapters, since most MRC processes require stakeholder engagement and cooperation (e.g. design of joint projects, review of procedures, harmonization of data, improvement of early warning systems). Since the establishment of a harmonized, basin-wide stakeholder platform is a result of all accumulated processes, the mainstreaming methods in this handbook and the existing Gender Action Plan provide the G&V mainstreaming framework for the envisioned platform. The harmonization of enhanced disaggregated data and their systematic incorporation into planning and decision-making processes are at the core of the MRC’s G&V mainstreaming.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
<b>Mainstreaming gender and vulnerability (G&amp;V) into regional stakeholder forums, consultation meetings, and related workshops</b>	What are the entry points to integrate G&V perspectives?	<p>The general goal is to integrate G&amp;V discussions into planned sessions in a more meaningful way, in addition to creating separate sessions/forums to address social issues. Experience shows that these separate sessions are mainly attended by stakeholders who are affected by developments/represent groups that are affected. Hence, these separate forums are highly beneficial for providing space for local voices and collect information on target group challenges, needs, and strengths.</p> <p>To foster the G&amp;V-sensitive debate and emphasize the collective need for enhanced disaggregated data; however, it is important to establish G&amp;V standards in all panels, presentations, and exchanges in a stakeholder event, as follows:</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Communicate in advance that all presentations and discussion outlines need to address G&amp;V aspects: What do we know about whom is affected, and who contributes and in what way?</li> <li>2. Ensure that G&amp;V-active CSOs and other specialists (e.g. academic institutions that conducted studies on G&amp;V) are able to join forums/meetings and provide space for their inputs in technical discussions.</li> <li>3. Use stakeholder meetings to discuss G&amp;V data gaps and options to address them.</li> </ol> <p>Balanced representation of the many stakeholders in these forums will be important, as well as consistent recording, reporting, and impact tracking procedures. There will be a need also to raise awareness and provide comprehensible information in the local language to some social groups so that they can have an equal voice during the forums.</p>

**Composition of the Joint Basin Expert Groups**

How can G&V elements be embedded systematically in discussion in expert groups?

**Identification of gender-experienced experts from national ministries.** They can be either technical experts with experience in integrating G&V aspects into their work, or Gender Focal Points from sector ministries. Beyond sector ministries, experts could be engaged from the **national gender machineries** (Cambodia: Ministry of Women’s Affairs; Lao PDR and Viet Nam: Women’s Union or National Commissions for the Advancement of Women; Thailand: Thai National Commission on Women’s Affairs). The partner at the ASEAN level could be the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), and/or Oxfam International.

Further, the **Terms of Reference** of experts should include G&V-relevant knowledge and experience, including gender-responsive budgeting. A key focus of the G&V experts should be the promotion of systematic disaggregated data collection, harmonization, and integration of G&V aspects into the design of joint projects, planning, etc.

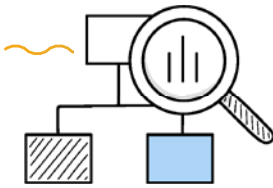
Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
<p><b>Design of a Mekong Fund</b></p>	<p>How can we utilize funds to promote gender equity and reduce vulnerabilities?</p>	<p>In regard to G&amp;V, the Fund design would need to ensure that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) all funded projects conduct a G&amp;V analysis (on whom is affected and in what way); measure benefits for whom and how) and integrate do-no-harm safeguards and aspects to promote equity whenever possible. An example is gender-sensitive disaster response activities;</li> <li>b) opportunities and partners are identified to specifically promote the empowerment of specific groups/regions in vulnerable positions. An example is the promotion of women’s leadership in local committees to enhance bottom-up monitoring/reporting for improved forecasting and impact evaluation regarding floods and droughts.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communication and Public Relations</b></p>	<p>How can we mainstream G&amp;V aspects into our regular communications and public relations?</p>	<p>Best practices in gender mainstreaming of communications and public relations are as follows:<sup>23</sup></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Combine disaggregated figures indicating the differences in situations/sectors for women and men, and the intersectional aspects of inequity they face.</li> <li>2. Ensure not only equal but also fair visibility (i.e. avoid portraying stereotypical work and unequal power relations), and aim to show a visual portrayal of women and men in diverse roles that challenge gender roles.</li> </ol>

<sup>23</sup> For communication and public relations staff, it is useful to refer to United Nations’ gender-inclusive language, as well as good practices on the issue (Marin, 2018).

3. Ensure that the contributions of women and men to activities/sectors are portrayed fairly and made visible, for example, the unpaid care work of rural women: Women's lack of participation in the monetized economy does not indicate that their work does not contribute to the economy; indeed, their largely invisible work enables other members of their family to participate in the workforce.
4. Adopt a gender-responsive language in publications: use 'women' and 'girl' instead of 'female', and 'men', and 'boy' instead of 'male', because 'male' and 'female' define biological distinctions in the field of medicine and biology, whereas 'men' and 'women' define human beings and therefore indicate personhood. Using 'male' and 'female' to describe men and women reduces them to their reproductive abilities and deepens the differences between men and women as grounded in biology, instead of socially constructed roles. For example, use 'women farmers' instead of 'female farmers'.
5. Further, where applicable, use gender-inclusive job titles in events, meeting notes etc., for example, 'chairperson' instead of 'chairman'.<sup>24</sup>
6. Avoid further victimization in language and visual materials, e.g. not 'vulnerable people' but 'people in vulnerable situations'; show women and men as active participants and agents instead of passive beneficiaries.

---

<sup>24</sup> For more useful inclusive language guidance, see United Nations' guidelines for gender-inclusive language (Marin, 2018).



## STRENGTHENING MRC'S ORGANISATIONAL MAINSTREAMING

This chapter highlights the organizational aspects and internal procedures that are critical to mainstream gender and vulnerability knowledge and application throughout the organization.<sup>25</sup>

Organisational aspect	Mainstreaming needs
<p><b>Promotion of accountability for gender and vulnerability (G&amp;V) mainstreaming</b></p>	<p>Accountability refers to the objectives and priorities of an organization as well as to its rules and procedures. Gender mainstreaming is a top-down strategy, i.e. the 'top managers' of an organization are responsible for creating accountability for its implementation.</p> <p>Accountability is achieved by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <b>formal mechanisms</b> (the MRC's mandate, procedural rules and job descriptions that integrate G&amp;V aspects);</li> <li>b) <b>informal mechanisms</b> (how managers address G&amp;V issues in meetings, how they are integrated into agendas, how G&amp;V-responsible staff are involved in decision-making; further, clear assignment of related tasks and responsibilities to staff members according to the Gender Action Plan and beyond).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Allocation of resources</b></p>	<p><b>Financial resources/gender-responsive budgeting:</b> Activities in the Gender Action Plan need to have budget lines, including potential capacity- development activities for staff.</p> <p><b>Human resources:</b> Ensure that the gender mainstreaming of activities (e.g. of early warning systems) is scheduled in staff/divisions' work plans. There is a risk that mainstreaming will be perceived as part of the regular work schedule and therefore becomes an 'on top' task or add-on that is more readily dropped. Indeed, G&amp;V mainstreaming requires analysis, integration, monitoring); therefore, time should be scheduled accordingly.</p>

<sup>25</sup> This chapter was informed by the EIGE's study on institutional transformation (EIGE, 2016a).

## Organisational aspect Mainstreaming needs

### Conducting an organizational G&V analysis as part of the organizational development plan for the MRC

An organizational analysis should focus on two aspects:

- a) A review of the composition of MRC Secretariat staff in regard to gender parity, equity and diversity throughout all MRC bodies and on different management levels will inform the respective diversity and equality goals of the organizational development plan. Human resources practices in gender-sensitive recruitment and performance appraisals, and the situation regarding equal pay should be analysed. Quota and mentoring schemes might be used to promote parity particularly in leadership positions. The goal is to foster a gender-sensitive, transparent, diverse, and equal organizational culture.
- b) A capacity assessment of staffs' gender competence and respective needs. The results of the participatory assessment should include an overview of MRC Secretariat staff and divisions' current strengths and weaknesses in mainstreaming G&V, and recommendations on where and how to enhance structures and staff capacities accordingly. Review focus areas should be on organizational structures (e.g. hierarchies, procedures), personnel (e.g. G&V knowledge, attitudes, informal practices), and the MRC's work areas and their outcomes.

### Formalizing the G&V internal support structure

While equal opportunity officers focus on equal opportunities within an organization's personnel, a gender mainstreaming support structure's role is to facilitate organizational change with respect to an organization's functionality and outcome. This is why the **role of an equal opportunity officer** should not be merged with that of the **gender mainstreaming support structure**. Even though the MRC is committed to mainstream G&V into all divisions according to technical tasks, specific support roles should still be defined.<sup>26</sup> This does not necessarily require the hiring of new staff, but rather recommends a clear allocation of tasks for, inter alia, the Gender Focal Points and Human Resources staff, including management support for promoting gender mainstreaming. It is always recommended to fix gender mainstreaming tasks into individual job descriptions and terms of reference, so that gender work does not become an 'add on' task.

<sup>26</sup> For useful details on roles and tasks of these support officers, see EIGE (2016a) on establishing a gender mainstreaming support structure.

## Organisational aspect    Mainstreaming needs

### Developing G&V standards for Communication

#### Develop or review internal and external communication standards:

**Internal:** Ensure that all staff are aware of the collective task of G&V mainstreaming, and the MRC's equality commitments. This should not be a one-time communication, but different communication channels should be identified to emphasize these messages regularly.

**External:** Highlight the promotion of gender equality as one of the MRC's priority objectives (website, publications, events). Review all public relations materials and publications for gender-sensitive language and visual material use.

Give communication and public relations staff the possibility to develop their related skills through training.

### Enhancing staff's gender competence

Experience shows that the effects of measures such as gender equality training can fade quickly if they are only delivered as a one-off session or if they constitute the only measure for introducing gender mainstreaming.

Gender equality competence comprises commitment, methodological skills, and specialist knowledge:

- **Commitment** refers to the recognition of gender equality as the aim of both the organization and of one's own work; it entails taking responsibility for the implementation of gender mainstreaming within one's own area of operations. Organizational commitment to and staff motivation for gender mainstreaming are mainly driven by managers' attitudes and good examples.
- **Methodological** skills imply the ability to implement gender mainstreaming using the appropriate methods and tools, as has been provided in this working aid. It also includes the ability to identify and procure the required gender-disaggregated data and to utilize this in one's own work. Since the current GAP is mainly focused on enhanced data collection, it will be particularly important to develop systematic approaches to use the acquired information on G&V aspects in the design and implementation of the MRC's activities.

- **Specialist knowledge** comprises both the theoretical understanding of gender as a social construct and in-depth knowledge of gender relations as social structures. It also covers knowledge of empirical facts about gender aspects within the organization's policy area and sphere of activities, as well as the ability to correctly classify and interpret gender-disaggregated facts and data. While not every staff member is expected to become gender specialists, it should be emphasized that every staff's skill development objectives include gender competence.

An organizational standard is developed mostly to assign the human resources management unit with the responsibility of creating, steering and monitoring a staff gender equality competence development plan.<sup>27</sup> However, it is still recommended that management work in close cooperation with the gender mainstreaming support structure to ensure close technical relevance.

### Gender Information Management System and monitoring of the Gender Action Plan (GAP)

The current MRC Strategic Plan (MRC-SP) and Gender Action Plan (GAP) place a significant emphasis on G&V-relevant data collection. Hence, it will be important to structure the management of data and gender information, which, it is hoped, will increase.

Core considerations to achieve this are:

- a) How can we optimize disaggregated data collection on national and regional level?
- b) Who will process the incoming data and information, and how?
- c) How will we distribute the gained knowledge effectively, and to whom?

On the one hand, the MRC wishes to mainstream all its work so data will be integrated meaningfully into planning processes, procedures, guidelines etc. On the other hand, it still needs to be ensured that gender information is readily available to be cross-accessed and utilized, internally and for other stakeholders.

<sup>27</sup> For useful guiding questions and best practices for the development of a gender competence plan, see EIGE (2016a) on developing gender equality competence.



While the technical units will be mainly responsible for collecting G&V data according to the SP/GAP, the identified gender mainstreaming support structure should be responsible for overseeing the quality of the content, regular updates, and overall coherent presentation. Setting up a gender information system should take place within (or adjacent to) the regular monitoring system of the MRC. Consideration could also be given to partly create a structure that can be accessed by external stakeholders to assist the MRC's goal to harmonize data collection and create a larger information base among basin stakeholders. The GAP needs to be integrated into the MRC's regular M&E system, including the additional sub-objectives/milestones defined in the Gender Action Plan document.

To make new information continuously visible, the gender mainstreaming support staff should aim to regularly distribute knowledge or updates to the whole organization (and beyond), e.g. through quarterly/annually newsletters and scheduled G&V update sessions in staff meetings.

**G&V organizational  
mainstreaming  
strategy/guiding  
document**

It is recommended to compile different aspects of G&V mainstreaming into one strategic document or a compiled G&V folder accessible by all staff and supporting experts. This strategy/guiding document would include:

- an overview on where and how the organizational structure supports G&V mainstreaming and equal opportunity promotion;
- a summary of the MRC's organizational equality objectives;
- gender-sensitive communication standards to be mainstreamed into the yearly communications plan of the MRC;
- staff development plan (gender competence promotion);
- the Gender information management system: where and how is gender information produced, and how is the data used?
- information on how (and by whom) the equality objectives and the GAP activities are monitored and steered;
- A GAP and Working Aid Annex.





## REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING

---

---

### Learning about gender



- ASEAN. (2011). Socio-cultural community blueprint 2025. Jakarta: The ASEAN Secretariat. <https://bit.ly/3BeWV7E>
- EIGE. (2020a). Intersectional discrimination. Accessed 20 June 2020. <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1492>
- EIGE. (2020b). What is gender mainstreaming. Accessed 20 June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3iKFCFi>
- EU. (2016). Intersectional discrimination in EU gender equality and non-discrimination law. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://op.europa.eu/s/xh5n>
- Gender Spectrum. (2019). Understanding gender. Accessed 20 June 2020. <https://genderspectrum.org/articles/understanding-gender>
- GWP. (1996). Dublin-Rio principles. Accessed on 25 June 2020. <https://gwptoolbox.org/resource/dublin-rio-principles>
- IUCN. (2018). Gender equality and women's empowerment policy: Mainstreaming gender-responsiveness within the IUCN programme of work. Accessed 25 June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3BgBblv>
- MRC. (2013). Commitment on gender mainstreaming in water resources development in the Lower Mekong Basin. Vientiane: MRC Secretariat. <https://doi.org/10.52107/mrc.ajgsg0>
- ONS. (2019). What is the difference between sex and gender? <https://bit.ly/3h3DvMh>

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. (n.d.). Sustainable development: Make the SDGs a reality. <https://sdgs.un.org>

UNSTATS. (2015). Gender statistics manual: What are gender statistics? <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/genderstatmanual/What-are-gender-stats.ashx>

UNFPA. (2005). Frequently asked questions about gender equality. Accessed 25 June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3FbYcNW>

SGV. (2019). Gender equality: What is it and why do we need it? Accessed 26 June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3HgRGYQ>

WHO. (2020). Gender and health. Accessed 26 June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3h7IECQ>

WHO Europe. (2020). Gender. Access 26 June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3iLCIVZ>



## Gender mainstreaming: Tools and good practices

- Brown, S., Budimir, M., Sneddon, A., Lau, D., Shakya, P., & Crawford, S. U. (2019). Gender transformative early warning systems: Experiences from Nepal and Peru. Rugby, United Kingdom: Practical Action. <https://bit.ly/3h1ZeUX>
- EIGE. (2016a). Economic benefits of gender equality in the European Union. Literature review – existing evidence and methodological approaches. Vilnius: EIGE. <https://bit.ly/3P75UNW>
- EIGE. (2016b). Institutional transformation: Gender mainstreaming toolkit. Vilnius: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://bit.ly/3iKh2nV>
- OECD. (2015). Stakeholder engagement for inclusive water governance (OECD Studies on Water). Paris: OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264231122-en>
- Ferrant, G. & Kolev, A. (2016). The economic cost of gender-based discrimination in social institutions. OECD Development Centre. Accessed 26 June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3iCWAVT>
- Marin, F. (2018). Let's speak gender: 10 principles of gender-responsive communications for development. United Nations Development Programme. Accessed 26 June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3VTbSnS>
- UNISDR, UNDP, & IUCN. (2009). Making disaster risk reduction gender-sensitive: Policy and practical guidelines. Geneva: United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction. <https://bit.ly/3VByZ6P>
- UN. (n.d.). Toolbox for using gender-inclusive language in English. Accessed 26 June 2020. [www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/toolbox.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/toolbox.shtml)
- UN. (n.d.). Guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English. Accessed 26 June 2020. [www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml](http://www.un.org/en/gender-inclusive-language/guidelines.shtml)

Wodon, Q. T., & de la Brière, B. (2018). Unrealized potential: The high cost of gender inequality in earnings. Washington, DC: World Bank. <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29865>

WHO. (2014). Gender, climate change and health. Geneva: World Health Organization. <https://bit.ly/3UDMH08>



## Suggested readings

**Best practices and lessons learned from global meteorological organizations on gender mainstreaming in organizational policies and practices:**

WMO. (2020). Mainstreaming gender in organizational policies and practices. Accessed 20 June 2020. <https://bit.ly/3F7BIOv>

**Dealing with resistance to gender mainstreaming (individual, organizational, discourse level):**

EIGE. (2016b). Institutional transformation: Gender mainstreaming toolkit. Vilnius: Publications Office of the European Union. <https://bit.ly/3iKh2nV>

**Gender Mainstreaming Guidance for Southern African River Basin Organizations** (This resource has informed some structural content of this Handbook)

SADC. (2015). Guidelines for strengthening river basin organizations: Mainstreaming gender in RBOs in SADC. Gaborone, Botswana: Southern African River Basin Organizations.

**Water Governance and Gender: A study on the profile of members of river basin interstate committees in Brazil** (This study provides valuable lessons on improving inclusiveness in representation of different groups in water governance committees.)

Matos, F., Camargo, E., & de Padua Carrieri, P. (2021). Water governance and gender: A study on the profile of members of river basin interstate committees in Brazil. Belo Horizonte: FACE/UFMG.

**On gender data and the need to disaggregate beyond biological sex:**

Valero, S. D. (2019). Why are gender statistics important? <https://bit.ly/3UEDfkD>



**Mekong River Commission Secretariat**

P. O. Box 6101, 184 Fa Ngoum Road, Unit 18 Ban Sithane Neua,  
Sikhottabong District, Vientiane 01000, Lao PDR  
Tel: +856 21 263 263. Fax: +856 21 263 264  
[www.mrcmekong.org](http://www.mrcmekong.org)

© Mekong River Commission 2022