



Towards Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion in the Water-Energy-Climate Nexus

Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks Network Program (MTT) Flagship Study and Rapid Response Projects Guidance

Note: Executive Summary



1. Introduction

1.1 What is this Guidance Note for?

This guidance note (GN) is designed for the Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks Network Program (MTT) Flagship Study and Rapid Response Projects to address gender equality, disability inclusion, and social inclusion (GEDSI). The note provides clear expectations, guidance and contextual information to support a comprehensive understanding of GEDSI in the Water-Energy-Climate Nexus (WEC) across the Lower Mekong Basin countries. In applying a GEDSI lens, projects will effectively mainstream a GEDSI perspective into their projects,¹ ensuring that the overarching objectives of inclusivity and equity core to the MTT program are also reflected in project work.

1.2 Who should use this Guidance Note?

Flagship Studies and Rapid Response Projects, to meet MTT and DFAT requirements, are asked to understand who the GEDSI-related actors are, what the GEDSI-related barriers, challenges, and/or issues are in the WEC nexus context of their projects, and indicate how they will logically, consistently, appropriately, and feasibly incorporate a GEDSI lens throughout their research and project work. These expectations aim to ensure a GEDSI-aware approach and that, as a minimum, the 'do-no-harm' principle is upheld.

1.3 Why is this needed?

The Long-term Goal of the MTT is to **"Contribute to improved and more equitable water and energy security, adaptation and mitigation to climate change in the Mekong Region for the benefit of all, especially the marginalized, vulnerable and at-risk communities."**

Aligned to this, and more concretely, the End of Program Outcome is that **"Water, energy and climate research and policy interfaces are robust and more inclusive, resulting in more effective and equitable policies, which are cross-sectoral, informed by evidence, and are responding to the needs of vulnerable groups."**² Evident in these aims is that MTT's focus on research and policy at the Water-Energy-Climate nexus is not only to contribute to enhanced effectiveness but equally to enhanced inclusiveness in policy processes and equity in policy and its outcomes.

IMAGE (ABOVE) by Torjtrix from Getty Images

¹Mainstreaming approaches refer to integrating and incorporating specific considerations or issues into the mainstream or core activities, policies, and practices of a project Program, organisation, or society. It involves incorporating these considerations as a fundamental part of decision-making processes rather than treating them as separate or peripheral concerns. The goal of mainstreaming these issues or considerations is to create sustainable and long-lasting change, where equity, inclusion, or sustainability becomes an integral part of the normative practices and decision-making processes rather than an isolated or peripheral concern.

²Ibid, pg 13.

³Ibid, pg 9. As per the Program Design document (pg 9), the third prongs of its commitments on GEDSI is: 3. Development of regional network/alliance of KBPIOs (membership, composition, processes) itself: Catalysing results and role modelling inclusion.

⁴Ibid, pg 9.

To set up for success on this Goal and Outcome, MTT has committed to: “The research sponsored, synthesized and recommendations that flow from it [being] gender (and socially) responsive or transformative.”³ Similarly, it has committed to “Policy interfaces/processes [being] gender and socially-inclusive.”⁴ As such, **all research and policy engagement within MTT needs to integrate (mainstream) a Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) lens consistently and appropriately** across all aspects of their work.

Flagship Studies and Rapid Response Projects are asked to meet GEDSI-related MTT program objectives and DFAT requirements and policies. Text box 1 (below) identifies the key DFAT strategies and approaches for consideration.

Text box 1: DFAT Strategies and Approaches for GEDSI⁵

- Australia’s International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/publications/australias-international-disability-equity-and-rights-strategy-advancing-equity-transform-lives>
- DFAT Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment Strategy: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/gender-equality-and-womens-empower-ment-strategy.pdf>
- Australia’s International Development Policy: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-for-all-2015-2020.pdf>
- Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion Analysis Good Practice Note: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/gender-equality-disability-social-inclusion-analysis-good-practice-note.pdf>
- Disability Inclusion in the DFAT Development Program Good Practice Note (April 2021): www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/disability-inclusive-development-guidance-note.pdf

2. Key GEDSI issues and approaches in the Lower Mekong Basin WEC Nexus

2.1 Key GEDSI issues in the Lower Mekong Basin WEC Nexus

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of women, men, girls, boys, and people of diverse genders. **Gender equity** and wider equality are achieved when the different behaviors, aspirations, and needs of all people are equally valued and accounted for.

The term “**people with disabilities**” is conceptualized as including those with episodic or long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.⁶

Disabilities = impairments + barriers

Impairments may limit an individual’s personal or social functioning compared to those who do not share the same impairment (characteristic or condition, such as hearing and/or vision impairment, developmental delay, or physical impairment). Impairments can be visible and permanent, and they can also be invisible and temporary, which can make identifying and

⁵Please see Section 3 of the full GEDSI Guidance Note for Flagship Study and Rapid Response Projects for additional details.

⁶From DFAT’s Development for All 2015–2020 May 2015 Strategy (available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-for-all-2015-2020.pdf>): The reference to disability is based on the characterisation of persons with a disability in Article 1 of the CRPD. The term ‘episodic’ has been added by DFAT in line with the ‘evolving concept of disability’ referred to in the Preamble (e).

⁷From DFAT’s Development for All 2015–2020 May 2015 Strategy (available at: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/development-for-all-2015-2020.pdf>): While prevention of impairments (for example, avoidable blindness and road safety activities) remains an important public health objective, it is outside the scope of disability-inclusive development as set out in this strategy and recognised in the mid-term review of Development for All: L. Kelly and L. Wapling, Development for All Mid-Term Review Report, October 2012, p. 31, 65, viewed 23 January 2015, <<http://dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/Pages/development-for-all-strategy-mid-term-review.aspx>>.

including people experiencing impairments difficult.⁷

Disability-inclusive development promotes effective development by recognizing that, like all members of a population, people with disabilities are both beneficiaries and agents of development. An inclusive approach seeks to identify and address barriers that prevent people with disabilities from participating in and benefiting from development. The explicit inclusion of people with disabilities as active participants in development processes leads to broader benefits for families and communities, reduces the impacts of poverty, and positively contributes to a country's economic growth. People with disabilities are the most significant and most disadvantaged minority in the world.

Social inclusion encompasses groups that are socially marginalized or have inequitable access or control of resources to fully participate in, and benefit from, development processes. The Mekong sub-region is home to diverse peoples, including Indigenous peoples/ethnic minorities, who are often the poorest of the poor within their countries.⁸ The percentage of the population regarded as Indigenous or an ethnic minority varies considerably from country to country.⁹

2.2 Key GEDSI approaches in the Lower Mekong Basin WEC Nexus

A GEDSI-aware approach:

- Aims to understand risks to women and people of diverse genders, people with disabilities, and socially marginalized groups when undertaking a project.
- Project activities do not exacerbate existing inequities or exclusion practices.

The 'do-no-harm' principle:

- Ensures that initiatives, at a minimum, do not pose undue risks to local people and marginalized community members and do not jeopardize their livelihoods or well-being.
- When socially marginalized groups and their interests are ignored, projects unwillingly contribute to and exacerbate the conditions that perpetuate poverty and exclusion.

Meaningful engagement of women, men, and people with disabilities in a project requires understanding these barriers and proactive measures to address them. Strategies to meet with GEDSI groups need to be tailored to their needs and roles. Something as simple as the time of day and location of where project activities are held can be designed to allow for women's inclusion. Consulting with diverse women and people with disabilities may require alternative approaches and different modalities, and projects are encouraged to consider how to engage women and gender-diverse people in the various stages of their projects.

Intersectionality acknowledges that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and oppression and that we must consider everything and anything that can marginalize people, including gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, and physical ability. An **intersectional GEDSI lens** supports projects to address this complexity, recognizing different experiences result in different lived experiences and unique

⁷Errico, S. (2017). The rights of indigenous peoples in Asia: Human rights-based overview of national legal and policy frameworks against the backdrop of country strategies for development and poverty reduction. Geneva and Bangkok: International Labour Organization. (page 1).

⁸1-1.5% in Thailand and Cambodia; 13.8% in Vietnam; and between 35 and 70% in Laos (see: Errico, S. (2017). The rights of indigenous peoples in Asia: Human rights-based overview of national legal and policy frameworks against the backdrop of country strategies for development and poverty reduction. Geneva and Bangkok: International Labour Organization. (page 3)).

barriers to engaging in water-energy-climate change decision-making and policy development.

Flagship Study and Rapid Research projects are asked to consider how they can best apply an intersectional GEDSI lens to project design and implementation and how multiple identities may lead to barriers to contributing to the project work.

3. How to incorporate a GEDSI lens into your project

Table 1: GEDSI-related Expectations for MTT Projects

1. GEDSI-related expectation: Understand GEDSI in the project context	
a. Identify the specific issues of GEDSI groups in the context of water, energy, and climate change in the particular location of the project. b. Identify who is at risk of being excluded. c. Identify the barriers to inclusion & equity for these groups. d. Identify how they are involved and represented in the sector and project roles. e. Ensure the GEDSI approaches are mainstreamed and appropriately engage these groups in the project. f. Identify how GEDSI issues and initiatives can be tracked throughout the project cycle and integrated into the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL).	
Delivery/Output: ½ page narrative and stakeholder analysis as a part of risk assessment.	Timeline: With submission of initial project documents as a part of the risk assessment documentation.
2. GEDSI-related expectation: Designate a GEDSI focal point internal to project team	
Delivery/Output: Provide contact details of the GEDSI focal point person communicated to the MTT Secretariat.	Timeline: As soon as possible, by May 17th, 2024.
3. GEDSI-related expectation: Participate in GEDSI online training and GEDSI workshops	
Delivery/Output: GEDSI focal point and project lead will participate in online training and GEDSI workshops.	Timeline: Online training: May 17 th , 2024; GEDSI Workshop: May 31 st 2024; Regional forum: Oct 2024 (date TBD).
4. GEDSI-related expectation: Identify project activities to reflect the GEDSI lens	
Delivery/Output: Project table that illustrates how GEDSI fits in with stages of the project, including Theory of Change, Risk analysis, research methodology, MEL, reporting and manuscripts, etc. This should use a twin-track approach to address GEDSI mainstreaming and targeted initiatives.	Timeline: Output: 1-to-2-page GEDSI lens plan submitted to SEI within three months after the project start date.
5. GEDSI-related expectation: Demonstrate that the GEDSI lens has been applied through the identification of criteria, indicators, and means of verification	
Delivery/Output: Table linked with or supplementing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) framework documentation.	Timeline: Throughout the project, reflected in or alongside MEL.