
Handbook for Gender Mainstreaming into MRC Core Functions and Activities for 2021- 2025

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Background

In the development of the Basin Development Strategy (BDS) 2021-2030, gender and vulnerability (G&V) aspects have been given particular attention. As a result, G&V aspects can now be found in every chapter of the BDS, and the strategic plan 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 goes hand in hand with the ASEAN vision for a resilient and thriving community and reflects the significance G&V has received in the SGDs.

The overall lack of disaggregated data was highlighted as one key area of action, as the design of specific measures on MRC and member states' level need enhanced information on the status, challenges and strengths of different population groups. This way, we can integrate equality aspects meaningfully, and contribute to a just and equitable social development for the riparian communities. This goes hand in hand with the ASEAN vision for a resilient and thriving community and reflects the significance G&V has received in the Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs).

Key social issues which find repeated consideration 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. Based on that, the Strategic Plan (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 which put an additional emphasis on gender mainstreaming (e.g. the integration of vulnerability mapping into cooperative and spatial planning efforts). A Gender Action Plan has been developed as accompanying document to the Strategic Plan.

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 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 sustainable water resources development and management. Ultimately, this should in itself contribute *and* lead to sustainable and equitable development outcomes.

This Handbook will provide:

- An overview of gender terminology relevant to MRC's work
- Guiding principles for gender mainstreaming
- Guidance to mainstream gender into planning procedures and processes (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 MRC's organisational mainstreaming
- Additional useful references and literature links

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 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. This 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 strategy therefore leads with a “gender and vulnerability” approach to account for intersectional inequity and the different dimensions of vulnerability.

The prior analytical work of the MRC and other stakeholders has provided the knowledge 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.

We know that dimensions of vulnerability – economic situation, education, disability, language abilities, access to means of communication, age, different life stages, amongst many others – have significant impact on the resilience of people living in the basin, and are essential to 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 timely with decision-making processes and budget allocations. This multi-dimensional data gap needs urgent addressing by the basin community.

MRC uses the following definitions when promoting a G&V approach:

GENDER	According to 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 ¹ . This understanding of gender is therefore socially constructed. Gender is increasingly understood as not binary but 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 ² .
SEX	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 ³ – and is assigned at birth.
GENDER EQUALITY	<p>The absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in opportunities, the allocation of resources and benefits, or access to services⁴. Gender equality is 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.</p> <p>Gender equality is a human right. Everyone benefits from gender equality⁵.</p>
GENDER EQUITY	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 ⁶ . 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 a level playing field. Equity leads to equality ⁷ .
GENDER MAINSTREAMING	The process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels.

¹ WHO 2020

² For example: UK Government 2019

³ Read more about gender spectrum here: Gender Spectrum 2019.

⁴ WHO Europe 2020

⁵ Definition and examples on how gender inequality affects everyone, and how equality benefits everyone: Victorian Government Australia 2019

⁶ WHO Europe 2020

⁷ UNFPA 2005

	<p>It is 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 gender is both a technical and a political process which requires shifts in organizational cultures and ways of thinking, as well as in the goals, structures and resource allocations.... Mainstreaming requires changes at different levels within institutions, in agenda setting, policy-making, planning, implementation and evaluation. Instruments for the mainstreaming effort include new staffing and budgeting practices, training programmes, policy procedures and guidelines⁸.</p> <p>Note: the common definitions of GM 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), e.g. of LGBTIAQ+ people.</p>
<p>INTERSECTIONAL DISCRIMINATION</p>	<p>Discrimination that takes place on the basis of several personal grounds or characteristics/identities, which operate and interact with each other at the same time in such a way as to be inseparable⁹. A person who is discriminated against on grounds of their race might also suffer discrimination on grounds of their gender, their sexual orientation, their religion or belief, their age or their disability. Such discrimination can create cumulative disadvantage¹⁰. In the Mekong riparian states, we thus often find 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.</p>
<p>GENDER-RESPONSIVENESS</p>	<p>To identify and understand gender gaps and biases, and then act on them, developing and implementing actions to overcome challenges and barriers, thereby improving gender equality. In comparison to <i>gender sensitive</i> (understanding and considering socio-cultural factors underlying sex-based discrimination), gender responsive has come to mean more than “doing no harm”; it means “to do better”. A gender-responsive approach is therefore more proactive, puts resources into gender analysis and adopts a strategic approach to</p>

⁸ WHO Europe 2020

⁹ EIGE Europe 2020 on Intersectional Discrimination

¹⁰ European Commission May 2016

implement measures addressing the identified barriers, e.g. by advancing women's and girls' empowerment via enhanced access to and control of resources and services, benefits, participation and decision-making. This approach helps ensure that MRC's policies, programs or projects do not exacerbate inequalities, but rather take meaningful steps to reduce disparities and empower women, girls and members of traditionally disadvantaged groups¹¹.

GENDER STATISTICS

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

- (a) Data are collected and presented by sex as a primary and overall classification (sex-disaggregated data);
- (b) Data reflect gender issues;
- (c) Data are based on concepts and definitions that adequately reflect the diversity of women and men and capture all aspects of their lives;
- (d) Data collection methods take into account stereotypes and social and cultural factors that may induce gender bias in the data¹².

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: what kind of information do we need in order to understand people's challenges and opportunities fully?

¹¹ Based on IUCN definitions: IUCN 2018

¹² This source provides a good explanation of what is meant when we talk about gender statistics, and why gender-disaggregated data is actually a misleading term: UNSTATS 2015

Guiding Principles of MRC's Gender Mainstreaming

The guiding principles mentioned in MRC's Gender Policy document¹³ are:

1. Gender equity and equality is considered an integral part of all MRC work and activities.
2. 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.
3. 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 organisation and throughout MRC's work.

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

- **Sustainable Development Goals¹⁴** (SDGs), particularly 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 communities in water management).
- **Dublin-Rio Principles on Integrated Water Resource Management¹⁵**: 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).
- **ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025¹⁶**: Reduction of vulnerabilities, inequities and inequality including on the basis of gender, equitable access to resources, promote community engagement in environmental management and protection.

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

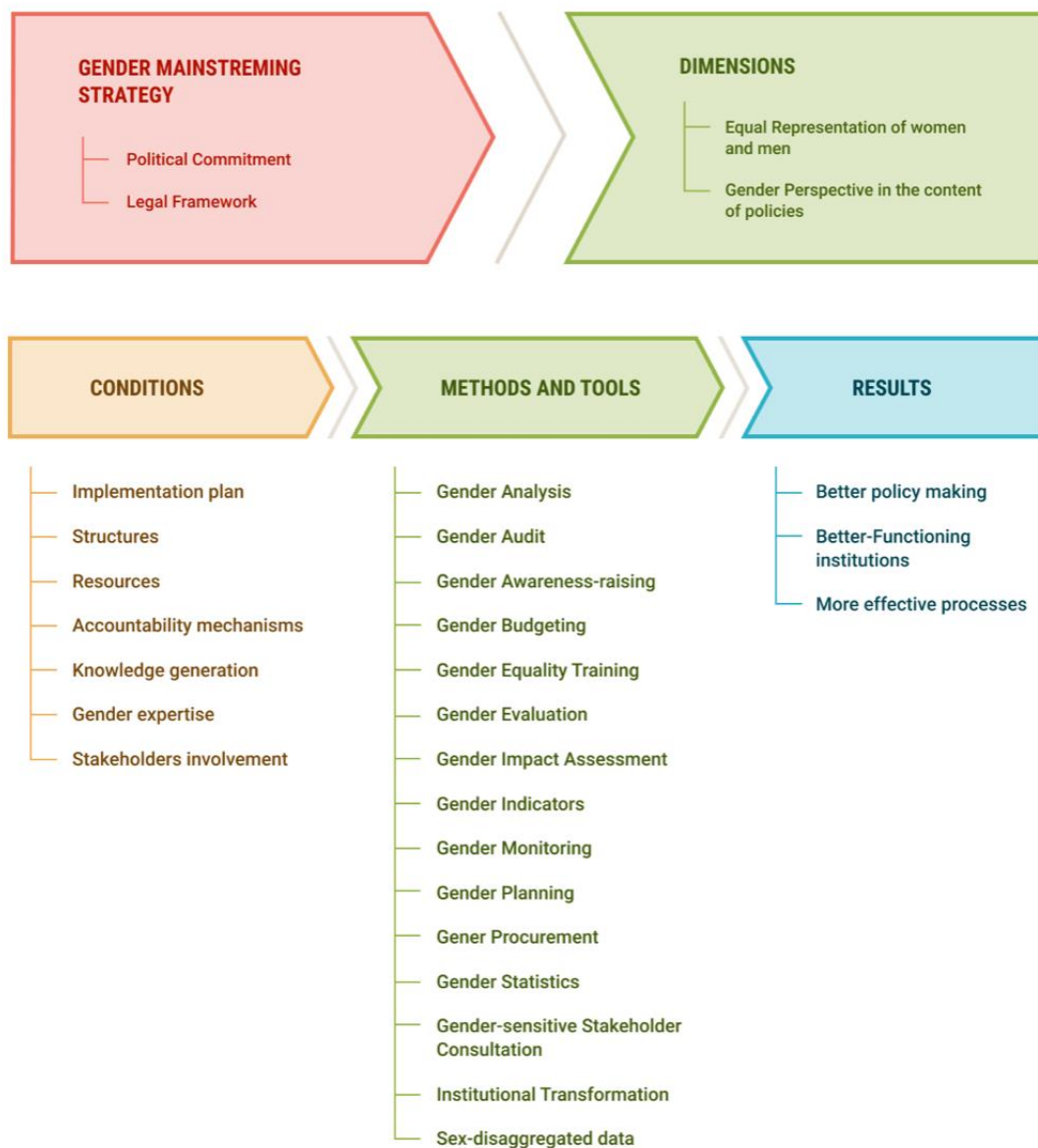
¹³ MRC 2013

¹⁴ All SDGs: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs.

¹⁵ Global Water Partnership.

¹⁶ ASEAN 2016

Gender mainstreaming has multiple dimensions, most of them are covered in this working aid and the current Gender Action Plan as part of the Basin Development Strategy and MRC’s Strategic Plan. This working aid will cover most of the dimensions according to MRC’s core work areas. This graph¹⁷ presents an overview of the dimensions of gender mainstreaming:



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

¹⁷ Extracted from: EIGE 2020: What is gender mainstreaming.

Mainstreaming planning support and processes

This chapter provides general guidance to mainstream gender and vulnerability aspects into planning procedures and processes with focus on the update and development of basin-wide strategies and technical guidelines. These are particularly:

- Integrated regional planning, regional sectoral strategies, and the creation and evaluation of alternative development scenarios, and the preparation of a basin-wide sediment management plan. Process includes the identification of 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 utilisation).
- Best Practice Guidelines and guidance on how existing and impending national and joint projects and programmes should be carried out to minimise potential transboundary impacts and risks.
- The review and update of MRC Procedures (focus in this strategy period: PMFM, PWQ)

Gender mainstreaming guidance and tools:

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
Review of MRC Procedures and technical guidelines	Does the current procedure sufficiently consider impacts of xx (e.g. water quality, water flow, fisheries) on social conditions and women and men's vulnerability?	Review and adaptation of the methods, tools and language 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 is not available, experiences from other basins might be. When no data is available, respective data collection/analysis should be initiated as part of the update/design process.
	Do we have sufficient sex-	Data gap identification and review of possibilities to gather needed data. Link results from other activities

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
	disaggregated data and gender statistics to update and monitor the procedure accordingly?	effectively (assessment of change limits for environmental assets, G&V analysis, G&V data collection and vulnerability mapping, DSS). To be able to assess vulnerability and impact, we generally need to know: who is affected how? Who contributes in what way? The specifics vary according to topic.
	How do we engage different population groups?	Review existing and planned community engagement mechanisms and identify efficient linkages (e.g. participation of CSOs in the Regional Stakeholder Forum to represent local voices regarding changes in water flow and quality). Update notification and management actions to ensure the timely communication with affected communities in case of emergencies or crucial changes affecting their livelihoods. (see pages 18-22 for details on stakeholder communication)
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) on women and men in the affected areas; what do we know about their contribution to xx?	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 run?

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
	<p>What information is missing to assess the potential impact on women and men in the affected areas? If Mekong-relevant data not available: are there best practices/experiences from other basins/RBOs? If we need to generate data: who, how, to what cost?</p>	<p>Addressing of data gaps:</p> <p>a) Request analysis by member states, externals (local CSOs, consultants), or development partners.</p> <p>b) MRC surveys using internal networks (e.g. CSOs active in Regional Stakeholder Forums; or targeted information sessions in the RSFs themselves).</p> <p>c) If data is needed in the framework of an emergency, funds could be drawn from the planned Mekong Fund mechanism (e.g. rapid assessment of health impacts on communities after toxic spills).</p> <p>d) 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.</p>
	<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 action. 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 to carry out paid and unpaid work. An example: droughts in developing countries bring health hazards through reduced availability of water for drinking, cooking and hygiene, and through food insecurity. Women and girls (and their offspring) disproportionately suffer health consequences of nutritional deficiencies and the burdens associated with travelling further to collect water. In</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		<p>contrast, in both developed and developing countries, there is evidence that drought can disproportionately increase suicide rates among male farmers¹⁸. Such gender-related impacts have to be addressed in guidelines and consultations with a) gender-sensitive risk mitigation/"do no harm" measures, b) 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, we will also be able to identify "change agents" within the target group to support behavioural and social change.</p>
	<p>Who can implement the recommended measures, and how can they be financed?</p>	<p>Besides content, any guidance also needs to address responsibilities and resource options to ensure implementation of the recommended measures. In those cases where Joint Expert Working Groups are involved in the planning of projects/guidance measures, an expert for G&V/social impact will be responsible to coordinate responsibilities and resources accordingly. The national gender focal points 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>Oftentimes, projects are already active in the targeted area, so coordination and exchange can be facilitated.</p> <p>Gender-responsive budgeting capacities are relatively low in most member states, so guidance from the MRC can include recommending that measures might need</p>

¹⁸ Example taken from WHO: Gender, Climate Change and Health.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		mixed funding sources (national, development partners, Mekong Fund if applicable).
Development of alternative development scenarios	What are existing inequalities and vulnerabilities in the target group within current development scenarios?	<p>G&V-sensitive situation analysis: Review and incorporation of existing sex-disaggregated data and gender-relevant information. Particularly relevant information: how is the gender division of labour in water resources-related activities? What are barriers and constraints for women and men to access water resources and their benefits? Who are potential “change agents”?</p> <p>Also ensure integration of information produced by other MRC activities (G&V analysis, environmental assets limit analysis, vulnerability mapping).</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&V-responsive approach)?	<p>Gender-disaggregated needs assessment and stakeholder analysis¹⁹. Can be conducted partly as desk study, partly based on stakeholder consultations (member states, CSO discussion during RSFs, target group surveys if possible). Goal is the identification of opportunities to promote equitable access to water resources and benefits of different population groups.</p> <p>Cost-benefit analyses for the alternative scenarios should attempt to include potential costs/lost benefits of social inequality as far as possible, and propose vulnerability-sensitive investment scenarios (e.g. vulnerability-responsive flood protection infrastructure planning). Key indicators for a cost/lost analysis which can be put into relation of water resources and their benefits and management can be: equity and equality in employment, decision-making, entrepreneurship, access to credit,</p>

¹⁹ A useful checklist for inclusive and equitable stakeholder engagement in water governance can be found here: OECD 2015.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		educational attainment, gender division of labour (paid and unpaid) ²⁰ .

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 focusses 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) on women and men in the respective communities? Who can we identify as “change agents”?	<p>Review of existing sex-disaggregated data and gender-relevant information (priority on 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&V into the study design. Example:</p> <p>Sediment transport study: 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 income opportunities for women and men each in the riparian communities (e.g. through impact of bank erosion on land use). Further, the study can aim to identify “change agents”, An example: as women are generally responsible for family nutrition, a communication strategy might want</p>

²⁰ Useful indicators for measurement can be found here: OECD June 2016; World Bank 2018; EIGE 2016.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		<p>to focus on reaching out to women to promote measures xyz in their communities to prevent negative health impacts of the identified pollution. Such targeted measures might further create opportunities for empowerment, e.g. through 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 of such mechanism (using the example of the limits assessment for environmental assets):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Using the existent frame of Regional Stakeholder Forums to include a session with community- and CSO representatives from selected key regions (e.g. key wetlands areas) to collect local perspectives on limits of acceptable change. 2. MRC commissions local CSOs to conduct limits assessments in selected areas, including community interviews, and feeds those case study data into the overall assessment. 3. MRC advocates for the member countries each to conduct such 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). <p><u>Guiding questions for all three examples:</u> who is affected, in what way, by what change (here: of the affected environmental systems)? Who</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		<p>contributes in which way (here: to the protection of the wetlands)? How are changes/non-changes exacerbating/perpetuating vulnerabilities and inequalities?</p> <hr/> <p>Each study/assessment should identify opportunities to reduce inequity and vulnerability amongst the target communities.</p> <p>Example sediment study: Aim to identify opportunities a) to improve nutrition security for all community members, b) for alternative income opportunities to decrease dependence on water-related resources, and c) 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).</p> <p>By defining these factors, social limits for change/do-no-harm approaches and opportunities to promote equity and reduce vulnerability can be defined for different population groups.</p> <p>The results of these analyses can also be used to inform cost/lost analyses for alternative development scenarios, vulnerability mapping activities, regional planning measures, sectoral strategies and the identification and design of national and joint projects.</p>
Vulnerability mapping	Which factors put women and men in the riparian	Analysis of existing disaggregated data and gender-relevant information, including gap

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
	communities in vulnerable positions?	<p>analysis. Core information the vulnerability mapping activities should aim to cover:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Map out poor and near-poor communities in areas of key environmental (water-related) assets (e.g. based on national census data and GIS) 2. Outline the regularity and severity of water-related disasters / incidents / events, and how they affect different population groups in relation to their water-, food and energy security, health, income, and time poverty 3. Add further information about the communities (as available) to increase understanding about intersectional inequalities (this feeds directly into activity 2.1.4.3.; e.g. ethnic belonging, secondary education rates m/f, employment sectors m/f, land ownership m/f, access to credit m/f)
Utilization of results: How can sectoral changes/investments contribute to reduce their vulnerability?		<p>The layering of these data will provide us not only with a detailed picture of the vulnerabilities and inequities amongst riparian communities, but the results of the mapping can be used to inform both regional and national planning activities (e.g. prioritisation of flood-resistant infrastructure projects in areas of highest vulnerability; identification of communities with highest needs of timely early warning communication; inclusion of determined vulnerabilities into basin development scenarios etc.)</p> <p>The data gaps which will be identified by the analysis should be used as basis to advocate for harmonised data collection with the NMCs.</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
Harmonisation of regional disaggregated data	What kind of data do we need to establish a baseline of gender statistics we can feed into decision-making and different planning processes?	<p>Even if the results of the vulnerability mapping will not be available immediately, the design of the DSS should already consider the systematic integration of some of the information to ease their incorporation once available. The implementation of the DAGAP including the provision to MRC of the social and economic data that countries already have will be highly valuable in this regard. That should at least include data on poverty and employment sectors (gender-disaggregated if available).</p> <hr/> <p>Even though we will have to review and tailor data needs in every individual planning/design/implementation process, there are a few common data baselines which would significantly improve most processes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Poverty data (including near-poverty: particularly important under COVID-19 development lens), disaggregated by sex, age, location, ethnic groups - Data about access to clean water, energy, food security, disaggregated by sex, age, location, ethnic groups - Employment data (formal and informal): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) in relation to water resources and b) in general for riparian communities (important to determine potential to decrease communities' dependence on water resources), disaggregated by sex, age, educational attainment, location, ethnic group. <p>The systematic collection of such data will need to be incorporated into National Indicative Plans (NIPs) as they depend substantially on national actions to be implemented. Involving local CSOs and development partners can be one measure</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
Improvement and integration of basin-wide flood and drought forecasting and early warning	What are current communication channels with local communities potentially affected by floods and droughts, and how can we utilize these channels best - both ways?	<p>to support national agencies in the data collection activities.</p> <p>Review of current national communication channels with and from affected local communities: 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 labour²¹.</p>
	How can we design early warning systems which are inclusive?	<p>Enhance early warning systems with gender-sensitive early warning communication mechanisms²² which cover the following factors:</p> <p>a) Vulnerability risk knowledge: Assessments need to include existing vulnerabilities and capacities specific to both women and men, and evaluate the risk faced by both groups</p>

²¹ Find examples here: Brown et al., (2019) Gender Transformative Early Warning Systems: Experiences from Nepal and Peru.

And here: WHO. Gender, Climate Change and Health.

²² Detailed guides to design gender-responsive early warning systems can be found here: UNISDR/UNDP/IUCN 2009. Further this: Brown et al. 2019: And this: GSRSP 2017.

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		<p>considering differing social and economic roles and responsibilities.</p> <p>In best case scenario, this is done through local consultations, ensuring that women’s representatives from disaster-affected communities are consulted and contribute to hazard mapping and vulnerability assessment standards. Women’s involvement and participation is ensured in the four processes: identifying threats, determining vulnerabilities, identifying capacities, and determining acceptable levels of risk.</p> <p>b) Inclusive monitoring: Systems that monitor, archive and disseminate data on key hazards and vulnerabilities include sex-disaggregated data and analysis of gender issues.</p> <p>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.</p> <p>c) Dissemination of meaningful warnings to those at risk: Warnings are formulated and disseminated ensuring they are adequately understood by all women, men, girls and boys at risk, and on time. Particular attention is paid to age, culture, literacy, information access and sociocultural context.</p> <p>Warning and evacuation systems include specific measures to reach women, ensuring to address any gendered cultural constraints on mobility and information access. Mobility constraints also</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		<p>have to be considered for community members living with disabilities.</p> <p>d) Response capability of communities: Evaluation needs to show that women, men, girls and boys understand the hazards the community faces, are alert to natural signs as well as formal early warning and know how to respond.</p> <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>

Mainstreaming stakeholder engagement and communication

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

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
Mainstreaming G&V into Regional	What are entry points to	The general goal is to integrate G&V discussions meaningfully into planned sessions , in addition to creating separate sessions/forums to address social issues. Experience shows that those separate sessions

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
Stakeholder Forums, consultation meetings, related workshops	integrate G&V perspectives?	<p>are mainly attended by stakeholders who are affected by developments/represent groups which are affected. Hence, such separate forums are most beneficial to provide space for local voices and collect information about target group challenges, needs, and strengths. To foster G&V-sensitive debate and emphasize the collective need for enhanced disaggregated data, however, it is important to establish G&V standards in all panels/ presentations/ exchanges of a stakeholder event.</p> <p>Examples are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Communicate in advance that all presentations and discussion outlines need to address G&V aspects (what do we know about who is affected/who contributes in what way?). 2. Ensure that G&V-active CSOs/other specialists in that field (e.g. academic institutions which conducted studies in that area) are able to join forums/meetings and provide space for their inputs in technical discussions. 3. Use stakeholder meetings to address G&V data gaps and discuss options to address them. <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 understandable information in the local language to some society groups for them to have an equal voice during the forums.</p>
Composition of the Joint Basin Expert Groups	How can G&V aspects be embedded systematically into the exchange in the expert groups?	<p>Identification of gender-experienced experts from national ministries. That can be either technical experts who have experience in integrating G&V aspects into their work, or Gender Focal Points from sector ministries. Beyond sector ministries, it can be considered to engage experts 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). Partner on ASEAN level could be the ASEAN Commission on the</p>

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		<p>Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC).</p> <p>Further, the ToR of experts should include G&V-relevant knowledge/experience, including gender-responsive budgeting. A key focus of the G&V experts should be the promotion of systematic disaggregated data collection, harmonisation, and integration of G&V aspects into the design of joint projects, planning etc.</p>
Design of a Mekong Fund	<p>How can we utilize funds to promote gender equity and reduce vulnerabilities?</p>	<p>In regard to G&V, the Fund design would need to ensure:</p> <p>a) That all funded projects conduct a G&V analysis (who is affected in what way; measure benefits whom, how) and integrate do-no-harm safeguards and integrate aspects to promote equity whenever possible. An example is gender-sensitive disaster response activities.</p> <p>b) That 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.</p>
Communication and Public Relations	<p>How can we mainstream G&V aspects into our regular Comms & PR?</p>	<p>Best practices in gender mainstreaming of Communications and PR are²³:</p> <p>1. Combine disaggregated figures with the illustration of the differences in situations/sectors for women and men and the intersectional aspects of inequity they face.</p>

²³ Find a toolbox for Comms&PR staff here: United Nations on gender-inclusive language. Find good practices which are partly reflected in this text here: UNDP 2018

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		<p>2. Ensure not only equal but also fair visibility (i.e. avoid portraying stereotypical work and unequal power relations), and aim to show visual portrayal of women and men in diverse roles that challenge gender roles.</p> <p>3. Ensure that contributions of women and men to activities/sectors are portrayed fairly and made visible; e.g. unpaid care work of rural women: Just because women don't participate in the monetised economy doesn't mean that their work does not contribute to the economy; in fact, their largely invisible work is enabling other members of their family to participate in the workforce.</p> <p>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 "man" and "woman" defines human beings and therefore indicate personhood. Using 'male' and 'female' to describe men and women reduces them to their reproductive abilities and enforces the differences between men and women as grounded in biology, instead of socially-constructed roles. Example: use "women farmers" instead of "female farmers". Further, where applicable, use gender-inclusive job titles in events, meeting notes etc., e.g. "chairperson" instead of "chairman"²⁴.</p> <p>5. Avoid further victimisation in language and visual materials: e.g. not "vulnerable people" but "people in</p>

²⁴ More useful inclusive language guidance can be found here: [United Nations guidelines for gender-inclusive language](#).

Process	Core questions	Tools/methods
		vulnerable situations”; show women and men as active participants and agents instead of passive beneficiaries.

Strengthening MRC’s Organisational Mainstreaming

This chapter points towards organisational aspects and internal procedures which are critical to mainstream gender and vulnerability knowledge and application throughout the organisation²⁵.

Organisational aspect	Mainstreaming needs
Promotion of accountability towards G&V	<p>Accountability refers to the objectives and priorities of an organisation as well as to its rules and procedures. Gender mainstreaming is a top-down strategy, meaning that the “top” of an organisation is responsible for creating accountability for its implementation.</p> <p>Accountability is created by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Formal mechanisms (MRC’s mandate, procedural rules and job descriptions which integrate G&V aspects) b) Informal mechanisms (how managers address G&V issues in meetings, how it is integrated into agendas, how G&V-responsible staff is involved in decision-making; further, clear assignment of related tasks and responsibilities to staff members according to GAP and beyond).
Allocation of resources	<p>Financial resources/gender-responsive budgeting: Activities in the Gender Action Plan need to have budget lines where necessary, including potential capacity development activities for staff.</p> <p>Human resources: Ensure that the gender mainstreaming of activities (e.g. mainstreaming of early warning systems) gets time allocated in staffs’/divisions’ work plans. Risk is that the mainstreaming is seen as part</p>

²⁵ This chapter was greatly informed by this source: EIGE on Institutional Transformation.

Organisational aspect

Mainstreaming needs

of the regular work time and therefore becomes an “on top” task which is more readily dropped/neglected. In fact, G&V mainstreaming takes time (analysis, integration, monitoring), so time needs to be allocated accordingly.

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

An organisational analysis should focus on two aspects:

a) A review of MRC staff composition 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 organisational development plan. Human Resources practices in gender-sensitive recruitment and performance appraisals, and the equal pay situation should be analysed. Quota and mentoring schemes might be used to promote parity particularly in leadership positions. Goal is to foster a gender-sensitive, transparent, diverse, and equal organisational culture.

b) A capacity assessment of staffs’ gender competence and respective needs. The results of the participatory assessment should include an overview of MRC staffs’ and divisions’ current strengths and weaknesses in mainstreaming G&V, and recommendations where and how to enhance structures and staff capacities accordingly. Review focus areas should be on organisational structures (hierarchies, procedures) personnel (including G&V knowledge, attitudes, informal practices), and MRC’s work areas and their outcomes.

Formalising G&V internal support structure

While equal opportunities officers focus on equal opportunities within an organisation’s personnel, a gender mainstreaming support structure’s role is to facilitate organisational change with respect to an organisation’s functionality and outcome. This is why the **role of an equal opportunities 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

Organisational
aspect

Mainstreaming needs

still be defined²⁶. This does not necessarily require the hiring of new staff, but rather recommends a clear allocation of tasks (Gender Focal Point; HR staff), including management support for promoting gender mainstreaming. It is always recommended to fix gender mainstreaming tasks into individual job descriptions and ToR, so that gender work does not become an “add on” task.

Developing G&V
standards for
Communication

Develop or review internal and external communication standards:

Internal: Ensure that all staff is aware of the collective task of G&V mainstreaming, and 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 MRC’s priority objectives (website, publications, events). Review all PR materials and publications for gender-sensitive language and visual material use. Give Comms & PR staff the possibility to develop their related skills through training if wanted.

Enhancing staff’s
gender competence

Experience shows that the effects of measures like 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 expertise and specialist knowledge:

- **Commitment** refers to the recognition of gender equality as the aim of both the organisation and of one’s own work; it means taking responsibility for the implementation of gender mainstreaming within one’s own area of operations. Organisational commitment and staffs’ motivation for gender mainstreaming is majorly driven by managers’ attitude 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

²⁶ Useful details on roles and tasks of such support officers can be found here: EIGE on establishing a gender mainstreaming support structure.

to utilise this in one's own work. As the current GAP is focussed majorly on enhanced data collection, it will be particularly important to develop systematic approaches to use the gained information on G&V aspects in the design and implementation of MRC's activities.

- **Specialist** knowledge comprises both the theoretical understanding of gender as a social construct and an in-depth knowledge of gender relations as social structures. It also covers knowledge of empirical facts about gender aspects within the organisation'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.

Organisational standard is mostly to give the human resources management unit the responsibility to create, steer and monitor a staff gender equality competence development plan²⁷. However, it is still recommended that they work in close cooperation with the gender mainstreaming support structure to ensure close technical relevance.

**Gender Information
Management
System &
monitoring of GAP**

The current MRC Strategic Plan and Gender Action Plan have a large emphasis on G&V-relevant data collection. Hence, it will be important to structure the management of the (hopefully) increasing amount of data and gender information.

Core considerations for that 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 wants 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

²⁷ Useful guiding questions and best practices for the development of a gender competence plan can be found at: EIGE on developing gender equality competence.

is readily available to be cross-accessed and utilized, internally and for other stakeholders.

While the technical units will be mainly responsible to collect G&V data according to the SP/GAP, the identified gender mainstreaming support structure should be responsible to oversee 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. It can also be considered to partly create a structure which can be accessed by external stakeholders to assist MRC's goal to harmonise data collection and create a larger information base amongst basin stakeholders. The GAP as such needs to be integrated into MRC's regular M&E system, including the additional sub-objectives/milestones defined in the GAP document.

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

**G&V organisational
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. Such strategy/guiding document would cover:

1. An overview where and how the organisational structure supports G&V mainstreaming as well as equal opportunity promotion.
2. Summary of MRC's organisational equality objectives
3. Gender-sensitive communication standards to be mainstreamed into the yearly communications plan of MRC
4. Staff development plan (gender competence promotion)
5. Gender information management system: where and how is gender information produced, and how is the data used?
6. Information on how (and by whom) the equality objectives and the GAP activities are monitored and steered.
7. Annex: GAP and Working Aid

Resources used in this working aid and additional useful sources

Learning about gender

ASEAN 2016: Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025. Accessed: <https://asean.org/storage/2016/01/ASCC-Blueprint-2025.pdf>

EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality 2020: What is Gender Mainstreaming. Accessed: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming>

EIGE European Institute for Gender Equality 2020: Intersectional Discrimination. Accessed: <https://eige.europa.eu/thesaurus/terms/1262>

European Commission May 2016: Intersectional discrimination in EU gender equality and non-discrimination law. Accessed: <http://ohrh.law.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Intersectional-discrimination-in-EU-gender-equality-and-non-discrimination-law.pdf>

Gender Spectrum 2019: Understanding Gender. Accessed: <https://genderspectrum.org/articles/understanding-gender>

Global Water Partnership: Dublin-Rio Principles. Accessed: <https://www.gwp.org/contentassets/05190d0c938f47d1b254d6606ec6bb04/dublin-rio-principles.pdf>

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Victorian Government Australia, 4. Dec. 2019. Gender equality: what is it and why do we need it? Accessed:
<https://www.vic.gov.au/gender-equality-what-it-and-why-do-we-need-it>

WHO/World Health Organisation 2020: Gender. Accessed: <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>

WHO Europe / World Health Organisation Regional Office for Europe 2020. Accessed:
<https://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/gender/gender-definitions>

Gender Mainstreaming: Tools and good practices (resources cited in text)

Brown et al., (2019) Gender Transformative Early Warning Systems: Experiences from Nepal and Peru, Rugby, UK: Practical Action. Accessed:
<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Gender%20Transformative%20Early%20Warning%20Systems.pdf>

EIGE 2016: Economic benefits of gender equality in the European Union. Accessed:
http://publications.europa.eu/resource/cellar/8ccc8269-3f61-11e7-a08e-01aa75ed71a1.0001.02/DOC_2

EIGE on Institutional Transformation: Gender Mainstreaming: A Guide to Organisational Change. Accessed:
<https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-institutional-transformation/gender->

mainstreaming-guide-organisational-change

EIGE on Establishing a gender mainstreaming support structure. Accessed: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-institutional-transformation/step-5-establishing-gender-mainstreaming-support-structure>

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WHO/World Health Organisation. Gender, Climate Change and Health. Accessed:
<https://www.who.int/globalchange/GenderClimateChangeHealthfinal.pdf?ua=1>

Further readings:

Best practices and lessons learned from global meteorological organisations on gender mainstreaming in organisational policies and practices:

World Meteorological Organization 2020: Mainstreaming Gender in Organizational Policies and Practices. Accessed: <https://public.wmo.int/en/resources/gender-equality/mainstreaming-gender-organizational-policies-and-practices1>

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

EIGE on Institutional Transformation. Accessed: <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/toolkits/gender-institutional-transformation/dealing-resistance>

Gender Mainstreaming guidance for Southern African River Basin Organisations (this resource has informed some structural content of this working aid):

Southern African Development Community 2015: Guidelines for Strengthening River Basin Organisations: Mainstreaming Gender in RBOs in SADC. Accessed:
https://www.sadc.int/files/2114/8188/3130/Mainstreaming_Gender_in_River_Basins_Organisations_in_SADC.pdf
