

26 March 2026



# IW:LEARN WEBINAR

How to integrate Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Inclusion in GEF International Waters Projects



# Welcome and Key Note Remarks



**Konstantina Toli**

IW:LEARN Project Coordinator,  
IOC of UNESCO

# TODAY'S

## OBJECTIVES

---



### We dive into:

- **Introducing** new guidance for ‘integrating gender equality, women’s empowerment and inclusion in GEF IW projects’
- **Providing insight** in the use of this guidance in alignment to GEF policy
- **Showing key steps and practical tools** for integrated project design, implementation, and monitoring
- **Highlighting** real-world **examples and lessons** learned from recent GEF IW projects
- **Exchanging with participants** on integration challenges and opportunities vis-à-vis the application of this guide in projects

# Why Integrate Gender Equality in GEF IW Projects

- Mainstreamed projects are **more likely to be effective, equitable, and resilient**.
- Considering the **needs, priorities, and knowledge of all stakeholders** - including women, men, and marginalized groups.
- Essential for achieving **sustainable transboundary water management and development** outcomes.
- Gender integration helps **address root causes of inequality, improves project impact, and supports compliance** with international and donor requirements



# How to

---

## Integrate Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Inclusion in GEF IW Projects



A timely and hands-on guide to  
ensure inclusive GEF IW projects



# Publication Rationale

---

- GEF IW projects often lack systemic gender integration
- Aligns with GEF Gender Equality Policy and Implementation Strategy
- Rooted in GEF IW experience on the ground
- Practical, step-by-step guidance for embedding gender equality, women empowerment and inclusion across project cycle
- For GEF project staff, implementing/executing agencies, and partners
- With tools, indicators, real-case examples, etc.

# Development methodology



## Sofia Tzavella

Knowledge Management and Learning Specialist  
IOC of UNESCO

# “How to” guide development



Webinar  
“How to”  
integrate  
Gender  
Equality,  
Women’s  
Empowerment and  
Inclusion

IW:LEARN  
Project  
consultation /  
questionnaire  
Comprehensive  
project result  
analysis

“How to”  
guide - First  
draft  
IW:LEARN  
feedback

“How to” guide  
– 2<sup>nd</sup> draft  
GEF feedback

1<sup>st</sup> Stakeholder  
Consultation  
(26/06/2025)  
Inputs from the  
practice

2<sup>nd</sup>  
Stakeholder  
Consultation  
(03/10/2025)  
Feedback and  
cross-check  
information

Publication  
on 19  
March 2026

# INTRODUCTION



**Laura Imburgia**

Senior Water and Gender Programme Specialist,  
UNESCO WWAP

# WWAP component on water and gender equality

1. Methodologies and tools for sex-disaggregated water data
2. Field projects in water and gender integration
3. Capacity development
4. Advocacy and communication

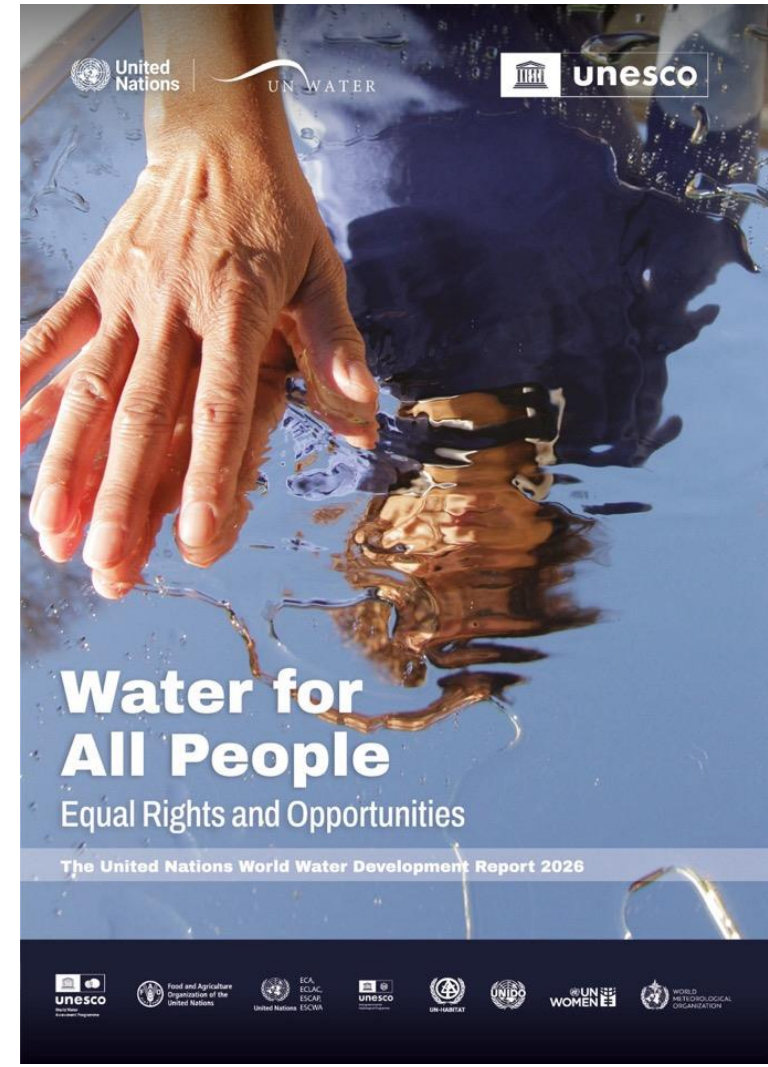
Our programme



# United Nations World Water Development Report 2026

Officially launched on 2026 World Water Day

*United Nations, NY*  
*UNESCO, Paris*



The UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme is supported by the Italian Government

# THE ISSUE(S) OF GENDER INCLUSION IN THE CONTEXT OF TRANSBOUNDARY WATERS



## Progress on Transboundary Water Cooperation


Mid-term status of SDG Indicator 6.5.2, with a special focus on Climate Change

2024

- Only **20/129** countries provide data regarding gender composition of joint bodies
- Only **19% of basins** have an **operational arrangement for TWC** in place that includes gender equality and social inclusion considerations explicitly
- Only **15% of basins** have gender-related aspects of water management within the tasks of their joint bodies
- Sex-disaggregated data on the membership and/or staff of the joint body is not routinely collected or available
- Involvement of women's organizations:



Observers  
in **10%** of  
basins



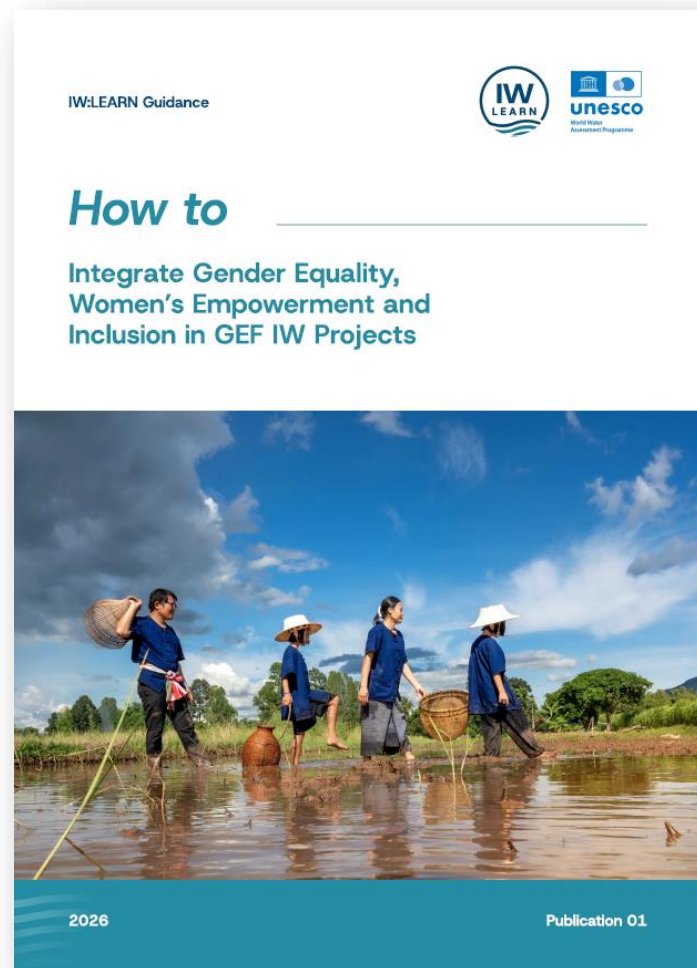
Advisory  
role in **8%** of  
basins



Decision-  
making role  
in **3%** of  
basins

**84%** of countries sharing transboundary waters have reported data

# GUIDE STRUCTURE



## Chapter 1 - Introduction

## Chapter 2 - Understanding key concepts of Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Inclusion

## Chapter 3 - Integrating Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Inclusion in IW project design & CEO Endorsement Document Preparation

## Chapter 4 – Cross-cutting gender-relevant activities during project implementation

## Chapter 5 – Conclusions and recommendations

## Annexes with IW project summary sheets

# GUIDE CONTENT

**On ‘Integrating Gender Equality, Women’s Empowerment and Inclusion in GEF IW projects’**



**Laurens Thuy**

Communications and Knowledge Expert,  
UNESCO WWAP

# GEF Guidance to Advance Gender Equality in Projects and Programs

## BEFORE IMPLEMENTATION

At Project Identification Form (PIF) / Programme Framework

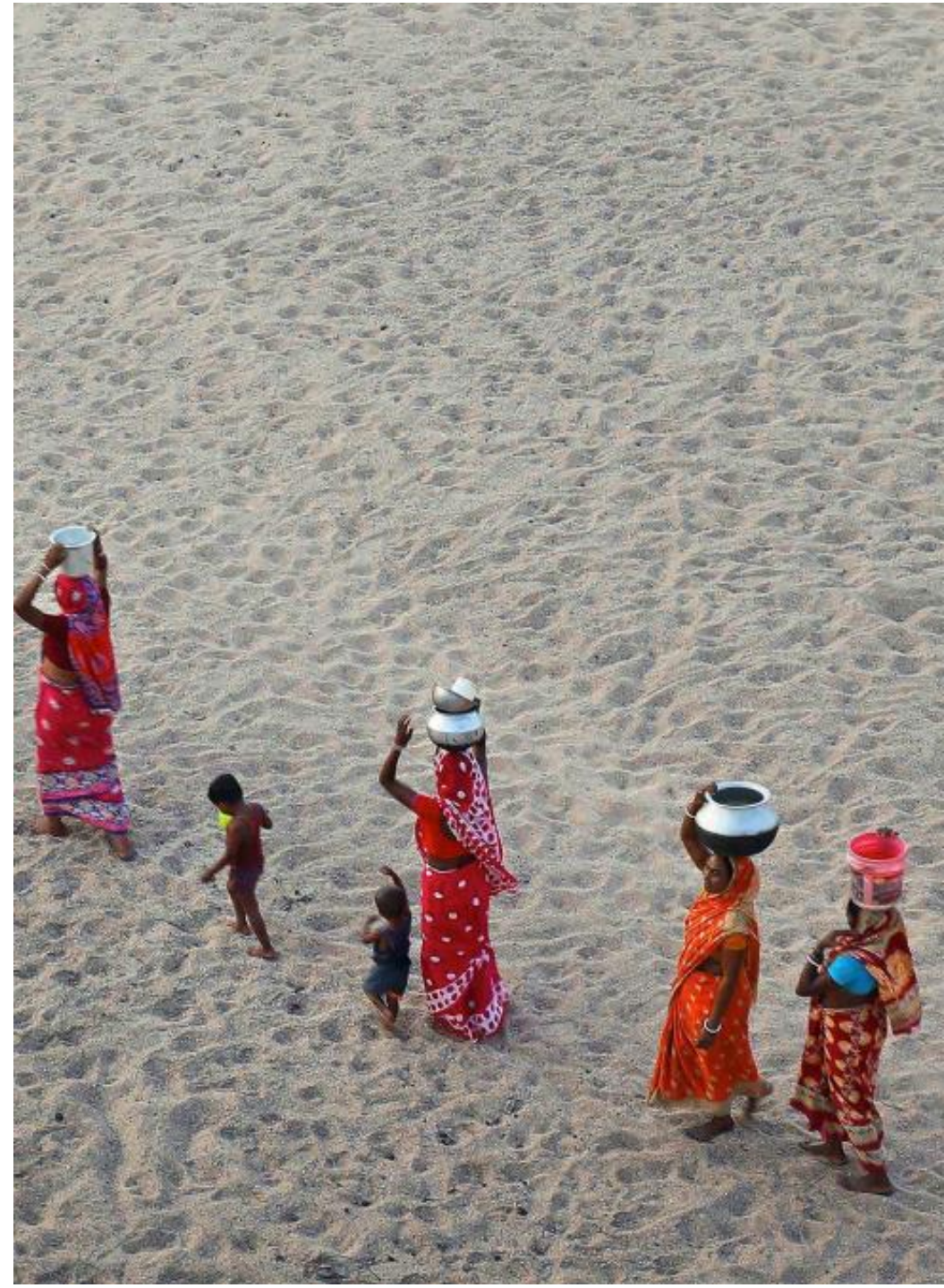
Document (PFD) stage, outline:

- relevant gender considerations
- describe stakeholder consultations
- how sex-disaggregated data will be collected

## DURING IMPLEMENTATION

Agencies must:

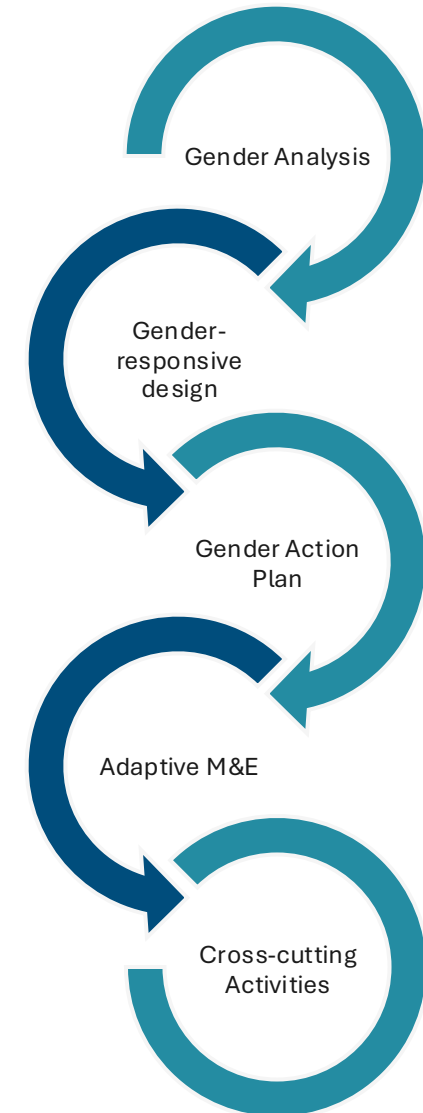
- Execute gender equality measures
- Report progress using gender indicators
- Mid-term review and terminal evaluations require gender results, good practices and lessons learned



# Steps for Integrating Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Inclusion in Projects



- Conduct **gender analysis** at project inception to identify gender differences, impacts, risks, and opportunities (Section 3.1.)
- Shape **gender-responsive** (minimum) **project design** for CEO Endorsement (Section 3.2.)
- Outline the goals, actions, measures to promote gender equality and inclusion in the **Gender Action Plan (GAP)** (Section 3.3.)
- Ensure **gender-responsive budgeting** (Section 3.4.)
- Integrate **gender-responsive indicators and targets** in the project's results framework (Section 3.5.)
- During implementation: **generate gender data; assess learning needs; develop capacity; inclusive communications** (Section 4)



# Step 1: Gender Analysis

## Why?

### What to analyze?

- Labor division, access to / control over resources, participation in decision-making
- Gender norms and power relations
- Barriers faced by women, men, and marginalized groups

### Methods?

- Desk review of existing data
- Key informants, stakeholder interviews / Focus Groups / workshops

### Outcome?

- Gender roles, gaps and opportunities
- Recommendations for integrating gender and inclusion



# Step 2: Inclusion in CEO Endorsement

## Build on gender analyses findings

### Adopt a gender-responsive approach (at least)

- Addressing identified inequalities.
- Actively challenge systemic barriers

### Develop gender-responsive outputs

- Clearly define gender and inclusion aspects
- Address key barriers
- Ensure key stakeholder participation
- Align with commitments

### Lay the foundation for change

- Change past the project lifecycle



# Step 3: Developing a Gender Action Plan (GAP)

## Objectives

- Clear inclusion objectives, aligned with project goals

## Actions & Activities

- Specify actions linked to project components and outputs
- Examples: trainings, consultations, women-led initiatives, ...

## Responsibilities

- Who will lead, support, monitor each activity?
- Expertise is crucial: gender experts?!

## Indicators and Targets

- Track change or progress qualitatively / quantitatively
- Realistic but ambitious

## Budget and resources

- Up-front budget accounted for each activity

## Timeline

- Realistic and aligned with objectives & outcomes

## Reevaluate

- Assess progress and impact with gender-responsive indicators

# Step 4: Gender-responsive budgeting

## Why?

### How to implement?

- Estimate realistic costs for inclusion activities
- Assign separate budget lines to track related spending

### Good practices from IW projects

- Early allocation essential
- Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Inclusion specialists or Focal Points
- Resources for women's training

### How much?

-Context-specific → 5% in Cambodia-Mekong River Delta Aquifer Project



# Step 5: Gender-responsive M&E

## Why?

- Evidence of progress, challenges and impact on inclusion
- Supports learning and accountability

## Timing?

- Embed gender considerations from start
- Design → implementation → closure

## Methods?

- Use quantitative and qualitative indicators
  - e.g. *% women and men reporting lack of water access*
  - e.g. *Perceptions of women and men regarding their influence in decision-making*
- Intersectional approaches

## Adaptive M&E!

- Use findings to refine strategies

## Reporting?

- Capture progress and insights

# Step 6: TDA / SAP

*(Not applicable to all projects)*



## 1. TDA

Shared challenges

### Rationale

Transboundary Diagnostic Assessment (TDA) is a **scientifically grounded, stakeholder-endorsed framework for identifying shared environmental challenges** to form the technical and strategic backbone of the project design.

### Recommended analyses

- Water, gender and livelihoods analyses with in-depth disaggregated data collection
- Policy and governance analysis across relevant countries and institutions

### **TDA/SAP process is fundamentally participatory!**

- Ensure participation of all relevant stakeholders

# Step 6: TDA / SAP

*(Not applicable to all projects)*



## 2. SAP

Coordinated response

### Rationale

Strategic Action Programme (SAP) is the **core planning document** that translates the findings of the TDA into a set of concrete, jointly agreed objectives and actions, ensuring reaching inclusion objectives

### Recommended Steps

- Implement gender-responsive budgeting and resource allocation
- Develop a gender-responsive M&E system
- Generate disaggregated data through participatory approaches
- Implement a learning needs assessment and related capacity development
- Promote gender-responsive communication and advocacy

# GUIDE CONTENT - continued

On 'Integrating Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and Inclusion in GEF IW projects'



**Epifania Amoo-Adare**

International Senior Gender Expert,  
UNESCO WWAP

# Cross-Cutting Activities

Recommended during implementation

## Data Collection

Generate disaggregated data through participatory data collection

## Learning Needs Assessment

Identify gaps in related knowledge and skills among staff and stakeholders

## Capacity Development

Organize training and workshops to build related capacity in project context

## Transformative and Inclusive Communications

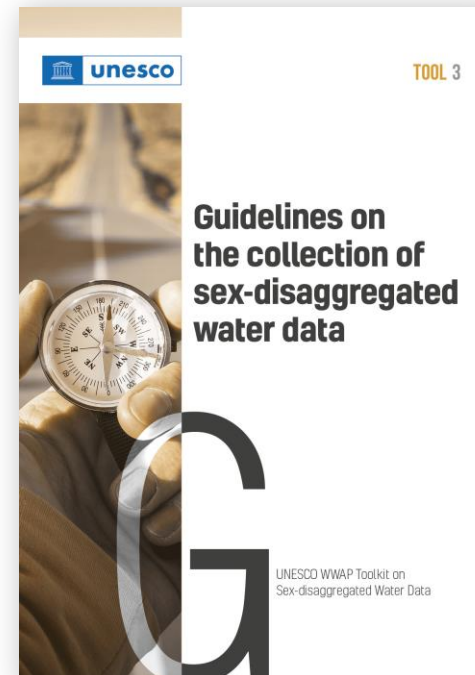
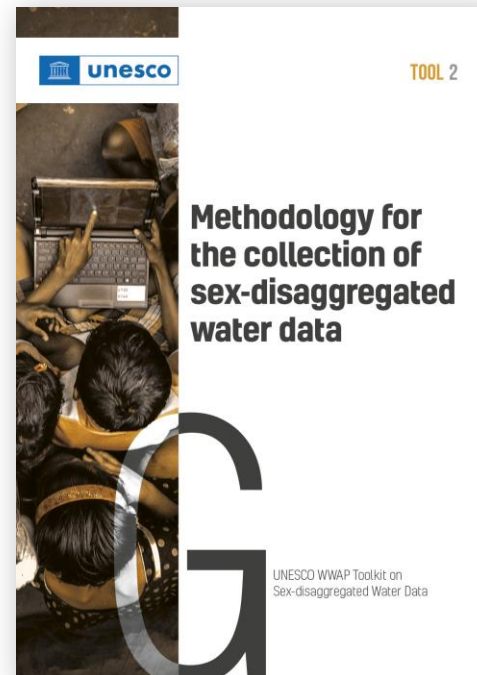
Apply a gender-responsive communication strategy, ensure inclusive project documents

# Data Collection - (participatory & gender-responsive)

## How to?

- **Identify and prioritise data gaps** from the gender analysis
- **Plan participatory data-collection** with national/local partners and GFPs
- Commission inclusive teams and **use mixed (quantitative + qualitative) methods**
- Ensure **intersectional, sex-disaggregated data** (age, ethnicity, disability, location, etc.)
- Apply **bias-free techniques** and enable participation of **representative sample**

## Example: WWAP Toolkit for Collection of Disaggregated Data



**A global standard for gender-responsive water assessment, monitoring and reporting**



# Learning Needs Assessment

## How to?

- Assess staff and partner knowledge on gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusion related topics
- Identify capacity gaps across roles
- Map responsibilities: who needs what?
- Design tailored capacity-development plans
- Determine appropriate delivery formats
- Plan for long-term mentoring, coaching, and follow-up

# Capacity Development



## How to?

- Address widespread gaps in formal training on gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusion
- Use reliable tools and methodologies for data collection, analysis, and integration
- Deliver on-the-job training, peer-to-peer learning, and practical exercises
- Provide tailored materials in local languages
- Strengthen institutional systems so new skills become routine
- Promote continuous learning through mentoring, coaching, and communities of practice





# Transformative & Inclusive Communications

## How to?

- Develop a gender-responsive communications strategy to institutionalise progress
- Challenge stereotypes, amplify under-represented voices, and promote inclusive participation
- Integrate gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusion considerations in all documents and processes
- Document and share success stories and lessons learned
- Promote collective engagement and shared responsibility for gender equality, women's empowerment and inclusion



# GEF IW Project Reflections

**LAC Region:** Fostering Water Security in the Trifinio Region: Promoting the formulation of a TDA/SAP for its transboundary Lempa River Basin.  
*Alexandra Carlier, Organization of American States*

**Asia Region:** Enhancing Sustainability of the Transboundary Cambodia - Mekong River Delta Aquifer.  
*Epifania Amoo-Adare, UNESCO / WWAP*

**Africa Region:** South African Transboundary Water Bodies  
*Litumelo Mater-Sievers, Global Water Partnership South Africa*

## IW:LEARN STAKEHOLDER WEBINAR

# Towards the integration of Gender Equality and Minority Inclusion in the CMDA project



**Epifania Amoo-Adare,**  
**International Senior Gender Specialist**  
*UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme*

26.03.2026

# Gender Integration and Equality Approach for Transboundary Aquifers (TBA-GiEA)



## 1. GENDER, WATER AND LIVELIHOOD ANALYSES FOR TDA

- **Diagnostic study on gender responsiveness on water policy frameworks; opportunities and systemic constraints** for women and ethnic minorities in the CMDA areas
- Gender impact analysis of innovative groundwater management/pilots
- **Outputs: 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 2.1**

## 2. RESULT FRAMEWORK

- **Gender mainstreaming across CMDA Component's activities**
- Definition of key gender-responsive TBA indicators and targets (4.2)
- **Related Outputs: all components**

## 3. CMDA GENDER ACTION PLANS (GAP)

- GAP including activities that ensure gender considerations and specific actions to empower women of diverse ethnicity in groundwater management and irrigation (4.3)
- **Related Outputs: 1.1, 1.2, 3.1, 4.2, 4.3, 5.1, 5.3**

## 4. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

- **Gender-responsive M&E SYSTEM (5.3)**
- Publications and Dissemination (5.5)
- **Related Outputs: 1.1, 1.3, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4**

## 5. INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF GENDER EQUALITY INTEGRATION AT CMDA

- **Capacity development** on sex-disaggregated data, TBA indicators, and gender and ethnicity in groundwater governance and management (5.1)
- **Gender Focal Points System (5.1)** / Integrating the gender-responsive approach at the **institutional and technical** levels of the project (5.2, 5.4)
- **Related Outputs: 1.1, 1.2, 3.3, 4.1, 4.3, 5.3**

# **WATER, GENDER AND LIVELIHOODS STUDIES**

## **The CMDA context for gender equality in water**

---

### **CAMBODIA**

1. Cultural and Social Norms
2. Institutional Barriers
3. Limited application of Gender-Sensitive Policies
4. Limited Access to Education and Resources

### **VIET NAM**

1. Cultural and Social Norms
2. Gendered Impacts of Water Scarcity and Climate Change
3. Limited Access to Resources
4. Institutional Barriers

**Note:** Key findings based on a desk study, i.e., the general literature review

# **WATER, GENDER AND LIVELIHOODS STUDIES**

## **The CMDA context for gender equality in water**

---

Complementing further identified gender-related challenges and opportunities from the ground:

- MERFI – Household Survey
- CMDA Socioeconomic consultants (Cambodia & Viet Nam)
- Expertise from national gender team (Cambodia & Viet Nam)



## Gender-responsive indicators for water assessment, monitoring and reporting

UNESCO WWAP Toolkit on  
Sex-disaggregated Water Data

# 2019 WWAP TOOLKIT – TOOL 1

## 105 GENDER-SENSITIVE INDICATORS!

Subdivided in ten priority topics

1. Gender Responsive Water Governance | Cambodia & Vietnam
2. Safe Drinking Water, Sanitation and Hygiene | Cambodia & Vietnam
3. Gender-specific Knowledge Resources | Cambodia
4. Transboundary Water Management
5. Water for Agricultural Uses | Cambodia & Vietnam
6. Water for Industry and Enterprise
7. Human Rights-based Water Resources Management | Vietnam
8. Water, Migration, Displacement and Climate Change | Cambodia & Vietnam
9. Indigenous and Traditional Knowledge and Community Water Rights | Vietnam
10. Water Education and Training

# Scope of the water, gender and livelihoods field studies

## Objectives

Collect data in line with identified gaps and priority topics that also align with the project objectives/goals. This may include data on:

- i. Gender roles and responsibilities
- ii. Livelihoods and work arrangements
- iii. Access, control and use of water, land and other resources
- iv. Capabilities and vulnerabilities
- v. Enabling factors (e.g., legal and policy frameworks, tradition and custom, etc.)

# Current Status

*Towards the integration of Gender Equality and Minority Inclusion in the CMDA project.*

**01**

## **Researching & Documenting – Extended Desk Review**

Collaboration with MERFI, socioeconomic consultants, and PMU, as well as local and/or national authorities, to consolidate secondary data from the field.

**02**

## **Revisioning & Implementing – Gender Analysis Study Tools**

Development of household survey, key informant interview, and focus group discussion instruments for conducting the gender analysis.

**03**

## **Networking & Collaborating – Gender Focal Point System**

Identification and liaison with key stakeholders (individuals and organizations) to obtain their gender expertise and support throughout the project life cycle (inc. development of guidelines).

# Thank you

Epifania Amoo-Adare

International Senior Gender Expert

UNESCO World Water Assessment Programme

[ea.amoo-adare@unesco.org](mailto:ea.amoo-adare@unesco.org)

[www.unesco.org/en/wwap](http://www.unesco.org/en/wwap)

# How to Integrate Gender Equality in Transboundary Water Management

## Experiences of GWPSA

Litumelo Mate Sievers

Webinar held on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2026

# Key highlights

- Global & regional frameworks - International instruments (SDGs, Dublin Principles, AU/Regional policies) have shifted focus toward mainstreaming gender in water management and governance.
- Institutional commitment - GWP has embedded GESI as a core theme across all programmes, projects, and investments.
- Regional progress - At least three RBOs (e.g., ORASECOM, ZAMCOM, BUPUSA ) have developed gender mainstreaming strategies.
- Project design - RBOs and African SIDS projects embed gender analysis and action planning from the outset, ensuring projects reach Gender Marker 2 with clear gender-responsive outcomes.
- Implementation and accountability - Gender strategies compel implementers to act, monitor, and track progress toward equality.
- Indicators and data - Inclusion of women-specific indicators in GEF Core frameworks (e.g., female beneficiaries, women in business ensures diverse participation and emphasizes qualitative data beyond numbers



# Challenges


- Institutional barriers - RBOs lack clear mandates or resources for sustained gender mainstreaming. Efforts are often short-term, fulfilling donor requirements without long-term integration.
- Capacity gaps - GESI expertise is not retained; reliance on Gender Focal Points mirrors Member States' practice, leaving gender work undervalued.
- Accountability vacuum - No dedicated presence to ensure visibility and consistent focus on gender inclusivity. Funding for gender focused activities remains insufficient.
- Data limitations - Lack of gender-disaggregated data undermines evidence based decisionmaking and weakens focus on gender outcomes.
- Limited participation - Cultural and social norms restrict women's involvement in many basins, though progress is evident in contexts like Namibia with supportive policies (e.g., 50/50 representation, family law reforms).

# Practical, Replicable Approaches

- Mandatory integration - Gender Action Plans are embedded in Social & Environmental Standards (SES), developed alongside tools like SEP and GRM.
- Dedicated expertise - Engagement of Gender & Safeguards Specialists (e.g., INMACOM, African SIDS, RUVUMA) ensures sustained focus and overcomes institutional barriers.
- GESI policy & strategy development - RBOs (e.g., under CUVKUN) process of formulating GESI Strategy underway; Member States appoint representatives to GESI Working Groups, strengthening accountability.
- Indicators results frameworks - Gender indicators integrated into GEF core frameworks guide implementers to design activities that deliver gender-responsive outcomes.
- Capacity building - Programmes engage national and basin stakeholders, CSOs, youth, and women's organizations to strengthen advocacy and inclusive participation.



# How IW: Learn Publication Supports GWPSA & GEF IW Portfolio

- Guidance framework - Provide step-by-step approaches for integrating gender equality into transboundary water projects.
  - Monitoring & evaluation - Recommend indicators and methodologies for tracking gender responsive outcomes.
  - Capacity development - Offer tools and training modules to strengthen institutional knowledge on GESI.
  - Case studies - Share replicable examples from Africa and beyond, offering practical lessons for GWPSA projects.
  - Scaling impact - Help align GEF IW projects with global commitments (SDGs, climate resilience, biodiversity protection).
- 





www.shutterstock.com · 1705002085



# “All we want is water”

- 42% of the rural population of Zambia relies on unsafe water sources
- Women and girls are responsible for collecting water in 8 of 10 households
- Boys and male youths also participating using different lifting techniques
- These responsibilities exert pressure on learners and at times lead to school dropout for girls
- The heavy responsibility of securing water exacerbates the already significant burden of family care that falls disproportionately on girls, limiting their opportunities for education and personal development
- Necessity to assist in household survival strategies, such as water collection and tending to drought-stricken farms, often leads to an increase in child labor reduces the time available for girls to attend school, undermining their educational attainment and prospects.

# Critical issues of water scarcity

- Women, girls and boys overwhelmingly responsible for performing the time-consuming and arduous chore of carrying containers that average about 20litre weighing between 20.5 – 22kgs ( head loading)
- Water fetching takes time away from activities such as domestic chores , health care, hygiene, outside employment, education and leisure.
- Water fetching can harm both mental and physical well-being
- **Study findings of a study by Jenna Davis form Stanford university [Program on Water, Health and Development](#)**
- Households with piped water spent 80% less time fetching water, representing a savings of close to 4hrs per week
- Over the past several decades, national governments and international aid groups have spent hundreds of millions of dollars installing basic water sources, such as wells and handpumps in peri urban and rural areas of Zambia



# Questions ?



**Contact us:**

**Konstantina Toli , [k.toli@unesco.org](mailto:k.toli@unesco.org)  
[pcu@iwlearn.org](mailto:pcu@iwlearn.org)**

**Sofia Tzavella, [so.tzavella@unesco.org](mailto:so.tzavella@unesco.org)**

**[www.iwlearn.net](http://www.iwlearn.net)**

**Contact us:**

**Laura Imburgia, [lv.imburgia@unesco.org](mailto:lv.imburgia@unesco.org)**

**Laurens Thuy, [l.thuy@unesco.org](mailto:l.thuy@unesco.org)**

**Epifania Amoo-Adare, [ea.amoo-adare@unesco.org](mailto:ea.amoo-adare@unesco.org)**

**<https://www.unesco.org/en/wwap>**