Credit: Samir Omar

INFORMATION NOTE

Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion in Practice

Introduction:

This case study provides an example of how to integrate Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) into the design, implementation, and monitoring of Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) projects. This case study has been developed to support applicants and projects with their approach to GEDSI.

Please note that this document focuses on a project-specific case which may not be appropriate for all contexts and is meant to provide an example and not a one-size fits all approach. All projects should conduct a GEDSI Analysis to inform their own project-specific approach.

For more information, please refer to the Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion page under Resources on all three BCFs websites (Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus).

Credit: Mohamed Hassan

Project Information:

Project Reference:	DARNV016
Project Title:	Promoting equitable gender norms to strengthen conservation governance and impact
Country:	Kenya
Duration:	2 Years
Total Funding:	£199,275
Lead Organisation:	Fauna & Flora
Project Partners:	University College London, Northern Rangelands Trust, Pate Marine Community Conservancy, Sera Wildlife Conservancy, and CARE International Kenya

Credit: Cheryl-Samantha Owen

Glossary

Gender	refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviours, and roles associated with being a women, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships with each other. As a social construct, gender varies from society to society and can change over time.
Gender Equality	the process of being fair to men and women, boys and girls and ensuring the equality of outcomes and results. It refers to the process of differential treatment that is far and positively addresses a bias or disadvantage that is due to gender roles or norms or different between sexes.
Intersectionality	describes the complex ways in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect and attempts to recognise the impact of these effects of the experiences of individuals and groups[1].
Disability Inclusion	refers to the process of identifying, removing, and preventing barriers that limit the full and equal participation of persons with disabilities in society. It aims to enhance their access to opportunities, resources, services, and decision-making, enabling them to influence the social, economic, political, and cultural factors that affect their lives. It ensures that the rights, perspectives, needs and contributions of persons with disabilities are recognised, respected, and meaningfully reflected in policies, programmes, and practices.
Social Inclusion	the process of improving the terms of individuals and groups to take part in society, and the process of improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of people disadvantaged and historically excluded from decision making and spheres of influence on the basis of their identify to take part in society.
Social Norms	the information, unwritten rules, beliefs, and shared expectations that guide behaviour within a group or society.
Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Analysis	an important tool that can help you understand and identify barriers and inequalities an individual or group may experience as a result of their social identity(ies) within a specific context.

[1] Definition from the IUCN Gender Analysis Guide, Spring 2021

Credit: Fauna & Flora

Background:

Inequality has been identified as a barrier to addressing biodiversity loss and gender inequality is one of its most pervasive and persistent forms. Social norms, and gender norms in particular, are one of the biggest systemic barriers to gender equality both generally and within biodiversity conservation. However, there is limited attention to, and understanding of, how gender norms influence governance and outcomes, how gender norms affect men and notions of masculinity, and in turn how these affect conservation

Women and men interact with biodiversity and natural resources in different ways because of their separate, gendered roles and responsibilities[1]. Due to these different roles and responsibilities it is understood that women and men have different knowledge and experiences of natural resources, needs and priorities. Historically, men were seen as the natural partners for conservation action and remain the main participants in and beneficiaries of conservation[2]. Gender norms, and the formal structures they underpin, are the underlying but often unrecognised roots of differences and inequalities that are embedded within natural resource management and conservation governance[3].

There is strong evidence that paying attention to social equity improves conservation results[4] and that women's meaningful participation leads to better compliance, transparency, accountability, conflict resolution, and overall conservation outcomes[5]. However, despite the evidence, women are still largely excluded from formal conservation decision making.

This exclusion is especially visible in Kenya's well established conservancy model. Women make up less than 10% of conservancy landowners, 5% of conservancy managers, and 5% of committee members[6]. These low levels of participation have serious implications for how effectively conservancies can protect biodiversity.

Current approaches to gender within Kenya's conservancies often follow broader conservation sector trends, including projects that focus on women's leadership training and economic empowerment. While these initiatives have value and can benefit individual women, they rarely shift the wider system. In many cases, they reinforce traditional gender roles, treat "gender" as if it refers only to women, and overlook the important role that men play in shaping women's opportunities and choices. Building upon previous experience, DARNV016 sought to address these issues of inequality and to support men and women in two Kenyan conservancies, Pate Marine Community Conservancy and Sera Wildlife Conservancy. The project aimed to identify, explore, and challenge harmful gender norms and practices, particularly as they relate to conservation governance. The project further sought to build an understanding of the mechanisms by which gender norms and inequity / equity affect conservation outcomes. Using this understanding the team generated knowledge and practical guidance for conservationists on considering and promoting equitable gender norms for more just and effective biodiversity conservation.

Credit: Fauna & Flora

[2] See evidence from Ecosystem Services for Poverty Alleviation (www.espa.ac.uk)
[3] James, R., Gibbs, B., Whitford, L., Leisher, C., Konia, R. & Butt, N. (2021) Conservation and natural resource management: where are all the women? Oryx, 55. Available at: https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/oryx/article/conservation-and-natural-resource-management-where-are-all-the-women/D6C52EA0E86D4CCD139AF02663DC9C97
[4] McDougall, C, Elias, M, Zwanck, D, Diop, K, Simao, J, Galiè, A, Fischer, G, Jumba, H, and D. Najjar. (2023) Fostering gender-transformative change for equality in food systems: a review of methods and strategies at multiple levels. CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform Working Paper #015. Nairobi, Kenya: CGIAR GENDER Impact Platform. Available at: https://cgspace.cgiar.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/a0964c70-620a-416e-a8f2-8712f45fa3d6/content
[5] Martin, A (2017) Just Conservation: Biodiversity, Wellbeing and Sustainability. Routledge
[6] Leisher et al. (2017) A preliminary theory of change detailing how women's participation can improve the management of local forests and fisheries. Available at: IIED and OSF
[7] KWCA (2018) Gender Strategy - https://kwcakenya.com/download/kwca-genderstrategy/#:~:text=KWCA%27s%20commitment%20to%20gender%20integration,arrangement%2C%20governance%20and%20operational%20processes

The Project:

Building upon previous experience, DARNV016 sought to address these issues of inequality and to support men and women in two Kenyan conservancies, Pate Marine Community Conservancy and Sera Wildlife Conservancy. The project aimed to identify, explore, and challenge harmful gender norms and practices, particularly as they relate to conservation governance. The project further sought to build an understanding of the mechanisms by which gender norms and inequity / equity affect conservation outcomes. Using this understanding the team generated knowledge and practical guidance for conservationists on considering and promoting equitable gender norms for more just and effective biodiversity conservation.

Approach

The project adopted an innovative approach to norms change called Social Analysis and Action (SAA)[8]. Developed by CARE International, this is a facilitated process through which individuals explore and challenge the social norms, beliefs, and practices that shape their lives and health.

Norm change is slow but can be accelerated by changing 'hearts and minds' whilst promoting community wide change, which is what a SAA approach is designed to do. Prior to the implementation of this project, SAA was successfully implemented by CARE in many countries with great success, primarily in food security, nutrition, and health projects. This project adapted their SAA to a conservation context, examining gender norms relating to natural resource management and conservancy governance, including how they influence conservation effectiveness, and considering the realities of conservation programmes.

The SAA approach sees selected individuals from different spheres (staff, board, and conservancy membership) undergo in-depth training. These individuals are supported to becomes influences, facilitating and contextualising reflection, followed by planning and action, within their peer groups thus diffusing changes in attitudes, behaviours, and gender norms amongst the conservancy.

It is important to think about GEDSI both in the context of the project area and the aims of the project. How will an understanding of GEDSI impact what the project will do, and how will the project impact those GEDSI dimensions?

– Helen Anthem

Aim to build regular reflection on and review of the GEDSI Analysis into your project design.

– Helen Anthem

Design

The project conducted a desk-based Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) Analysis that was supplemented with information generated during the early stages of the SAA process. Due to the nature of the project, the Analysis particularly focused on the underlying norms, attitudes and practices around the six principles of a GEDSI Analysis. The findings from the GEDSI Analysis provided background information for the SAA consultants who were not familiar with the specific project sites and norms there, and to inform the SAA process itself.

Six Principles of a GEDSI Analysis:

- rights
- practice
- environment
- roles & responsibilities
- representation
- resoources

For further information please refer to the Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion page under Resources on all three BCFs websites.

Credit: Fauna & Flora

[1] For further details see: Social Analysis and Action (SAA)

Implementation

The SAA process focuses on training of trainers, with trainers then facilitating discussions at the community level. Key to the success of the trainings and implementation of the SAA process was the framing of the sessions. Rather than focusing on 'gender' or 'women's issues', the sessions were framed around 'good governance' and introduced discussions around gender and social norms when deemed appropriate for the context. In Sera, as many discussions as possible were held in Samburu with Samburu facilitators. Speaking the local language facilitated a safe space for participants to self-reflect and openly discuss.

While the project had a primary focus on gender norms, due to women being the biggest marginalised group in Kenya's community conservancies, the SAA process naturally encourages a wider self-reflection on other biases and social norms. It encourages participants to consider their own values, beliefs, and attitudes. This naturally extends beyond viewing women as a homogenous group and rather takes an intersectionality approach (please see glossary for definition).

One of the methods used within the SAA training was the 'Dilemma Game'. Participants were given a scenario where five individuals are on a sinking boat, and they are asked to identify one individual to save. The five individuals represented varied social characteristics including one individual with a disability. This exercise encouraged reflection on social norms and how these norms influenced the decisions participants were making.

Another tool[9] used within these trainings was called 'Fixed Position'. The facilitator would write or use sticks to make the shape of the number three, place it on the floor, and ask people to stand on different sides and describe what they see. Some will see the number three, others will see the letter W, an E, or an M. This exercise encourages participants to recognise that individuals can be look at the same thing but have different perspectives, and the importance of understanding all perspectives.

Credit: Fatuma Athman

Credit: Fauna & Flora

Outcomes

The project's desired Outcome was for more gender equitable and effective natural resource governance in two community conservancies in Kenya and learning on promoting and scaling gender transformative change generated and disseminated for wider conservation programming.

In their Final Report, the project reported that evidence indicated that governance in both conservancies had become more equitable and effective. In both sites, 100% of respondents noted they felt governance had improved compared to project start.

The respondents noted that increased transparency, reduced conflict and increased representation of women, and improvements within conservancy decision making will lead to improved conservancy outcomes through factors such as increased motivation and reduced rule breaking. Also, all female respondents reported that their wellbeing had improved as a result of the project process, for example, through sharing of workloads and improved relations.

The success of the SAA approach can be seen in statements captured from participants:

"My husband supported our daughter's education (whom he previously wanted to marry off). Instead, he practically takes her to school each morning by his motorbike and attends meetings summoned by the school. Furthermore, he freely allows me to attend meetings, run my business and, engage in conservation work without complaining as in the past. Sometimes he supports me in some of the activities such as seaweed farming."

— Female, January 2025

[9] For a full list of tools used to promote reflection and discussion for gender transformative change, see Annex 3 of Guidance on Gender Transformative Approaches for conservation practitioners by Fauna & Flora. A link to this guidance can be found in the section 'Key project Outputs' in this document.

Credit: Fauna & Flora

"Ever since receiving the training, I have noticed a significant improvement in my confidence and ability to express my opinions in public. The training provided me with an opportunity to reflect on my personal inhibitions and fears, which had previously prevented me from speaking up. I believe that it is crucial for women to raise their voices and amplify their message, as this is the only way to overcome the challenges and discrimination that they often face."

— Female, December 2023

A male, Pate Marine Community Conservancy official shared that the SAA training has helped him understand that, like anyone else, a woman has the right to speak and be heard when sharing her opinions. Previously, he believed that a woman's role was only at home, managing household chores, and that women could not lead men. After undergoing gender sensitisation, he has learned that women have the same rights as men to lead and share their opinions.

"I have been able to have an open mind about gender. Women are valuable human beings as well."

— Male, October 2024

A key finding from the project team was the importance of maintaining a flexible mindset and approach to the activities. Given the sensitive nature of the project, the approach, and issues being discussed, it was necessary for the project team to be guided by how participants engaged with and responded to the activities. Key to the success and sustainability of the work was ensuring the ownership of the process sat with the participants. The project found it was important to balance directing discussions with letting people choose what they want to discuss.

As the SAA process encourages self-reflection, naturally this expanded to looking at characteristics other than sex that shape life experience and social inclusion.

For example, age, location (e.g. the distance between an individual's home and town), wealth, and social connection were discussed. SAA is also a good approach to use when considering disability; because disabilities are often hidden, SAA can be helpful in changing attitudes to disability.

Key Project Outcomes

In addition to what was achieved in the community, as a result of the SAA process, the project developed the following two resources from their experience of implementing the approach: a practical guidance on gender transformative approaches for conservation practitioners, and a theory of change which outlines how improved gender equity leads to improved conservation governance and outcomes.

Guidance on Gender Transformative Approaches:

Whilst guidance on Gender Transformative Approaches (GTAs) already exists, it is noted that the guidance available is not easily accessible for conservation practitioners. The guidance developed by this project seeks to address this accessibility gap, serving as an introduction to gender transformative approaches: what they are, why they are important for effective and equitable conservation, and how to promote transformative change within conservation programming.

As is the case for this project, the GTA can in effect be a stand-alone project. It can be more impactful and sustainable to integrate a GTA into an ongoing project, or alongside a thematic focused intervention. For information on how to integrate a Gender Transformative Approach into the project cycle, please see the guidance document, that can be accessed here.

Credit: Fauna & Flora

Theory of Change:

Linking gender equity with improved conservation governance and impact

One of the key aims of this Theory of Change (ToC) is to demonstrate how improved gender equity and addressing harmful gender norms can lead to better and improved conservation outcomes. This ToC aims to help practitioners with understanding and exploring ways to promote gender equity within the context of their own project, designing interventions, and deciding what to monitor when developing their own theories of change.

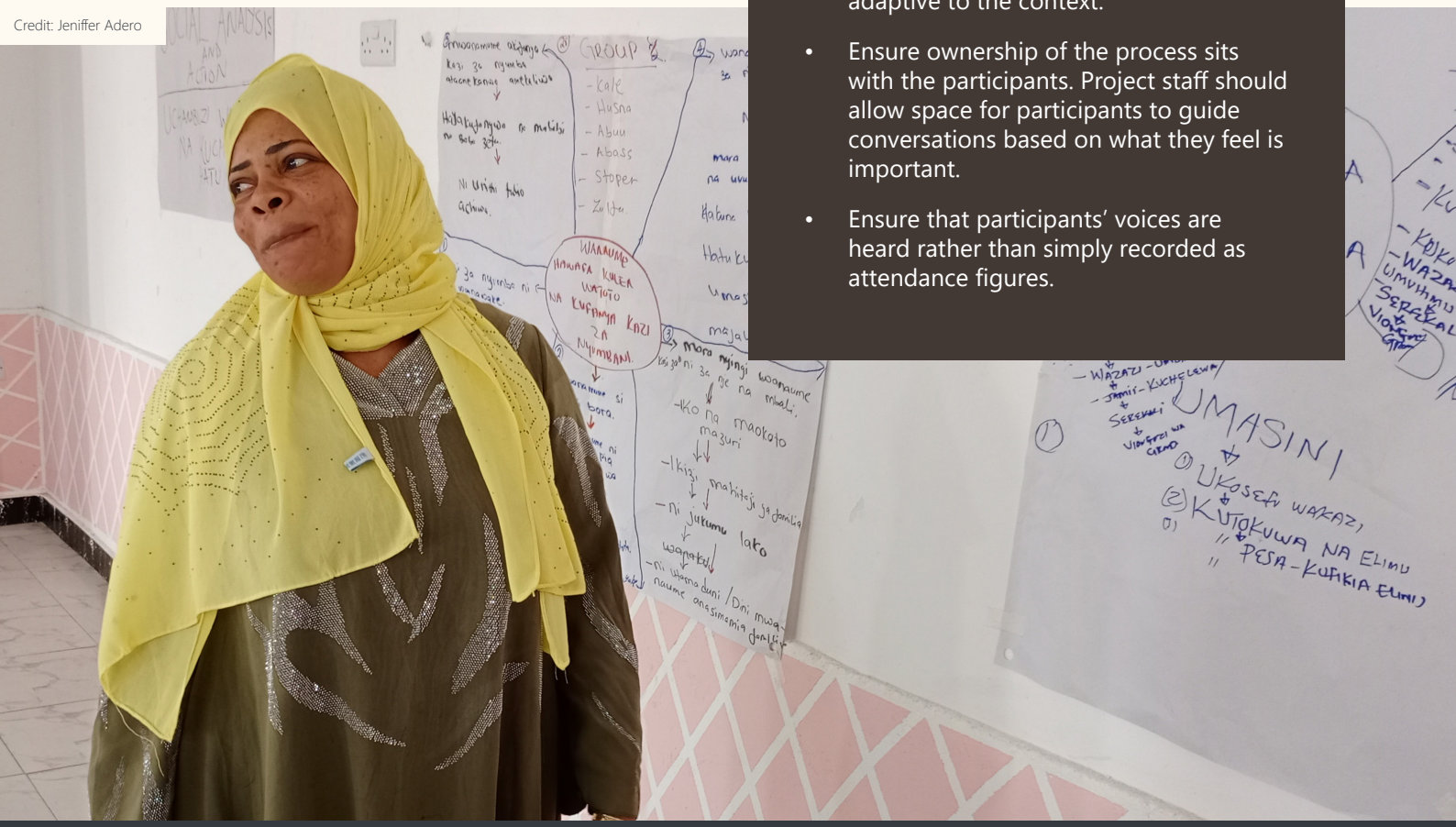
It builds on previous work completed by Craig Leisher et al. that detailed how women's participation can improve the management of local forests and fisheries[10]. The original ToC includes the assumption that "social norms and membership rules enable women to have a voice in a mixed-gender local fisheries or forest management group". Given the focus on changing social norms and the data generated from this project, the team sought to update it to focus more on social norms. This was recognised by adding two further dimensions of equity: recognition of knowledge, rights, and values, and the distribution of costs and benefits.

The ToC was developed by a group of gender experts working in conservation organisations through one-to-one and group discussions. The data gathered shows that changes in participation, recognition, and distribution are mutually reinforcing.

[10] For further details see: https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/rgakw_v1

Credit: Fauna & Flora

Top Tips:

- Conducting a GEDSI Analysis at the start of the project is essential in terms of having a full understanding of the GEDSI context in order to effectively integrate gender and social issues within the design and implementation of the project.
- A GEDSI Analysis is a tool that project teams should continually and regularly reflect on and review throughout project implementation.
- It is important to maintain a flexible mindset and approach to activities to ensure they remain relevant and adaptive to the context.
- Ensure ownership of the process sits with the participants. Project staff should allow space for participants to guide conversations based on what they feel is important.
- Ensure that participants' voices are heard rather than simply recorded as attendance figures.

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