

Guidance Note:

Integrating a GEDSI Lens in Rapid Response and Flagship Study Proposal Revisions

(Version: January 12, 2024)

Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks Network Program

I Introduction

The Long-term Goal of the Mekong Thought Leadership and Think Tanks Network Program (MTT) is to “Contribute to improved and more **equitable** water and energy security, adaptation and mitigation to climate change in the Mekong Region for the benefit of all, **especially the marginalized, vulnerable and at-risk communities**”^[iii]. Aligned to this and more concretely, the *End of Program Outcome* is that “**Water, energy and climate research and policy interfaces are robust and more **inclusive**, resulting in more effective and **equitable** policies, which are cross-sectoral, informed by evidence, and are responding to the needs of vulnerable groups.**”^[iv] Evident in these aims is that MTT’s focus on research and policy at the Water-Energy-Climate nexus is not only to contribute not only to enhanced *effectiveness*, but equally to enhanced *inclusiveness* in policy processes and *equity* in policy and its outcomes.

To set up for success on this Goal and Outcome, MTT has committed to: “*The research sponsored, synthesized and recommendations that flow from it [being] gender (and socially) responsive or transformative*”.^[v] Similarly, it has committed to “*Policy interfaces/processes [being] gender and socially-inclusive*”.^[vi] As such, **all research and policy engagement within MTT need to integrate (mainstream) a Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) lens consistently and appropriately** across all aspects of their work. This will be summarized in short project GEDSI Plan created in the early stage of each project. Small, GEDSI-focused information gathering activities (‘GEDSI Rapid Scoping’) will be needed in this early stage to inform the integration in a context-specific way.

This brief document provides guidance for Flagship and Rapid Response project proponents regarding expectations and steps for successfully, appropriately, and effectively incorporating a GEDSI lens. Following this Introduction, Section 2 briefly presents guidance for incorporating a GEDSI lens *throughout* the project cycle; these steps can inform the revisions of this grant application. This section includes a box that explains in brief the GEDSI Plan and GEDSI Scoping (or Power Analysis) that projects will carry out in their early stages to ensure that activities and outcomes will be well-informed and GEDSI-responsive, and not result in harmful impacts to vulnerable or socially marginalized groups. Section 3 briefly details of levels of support and guidance for FS and RR once the projects are underway are provided in the final section of this document.

II Integrating a GEDSI lens throughout the Project Cycle

GEDSI mainstreaming here refers to consistently including specific considerations into the core project thinking, planning, processes, activities, budgets and outputs and MEL. It involves incorporating these

considerations as a fundamental part of project decision-making processes (and analyses and engagements) rather than treating them as separate or peripheral concerns. The goal of mainstreaming is both to avoid the project unintentionally doing harm to marginalized and vulnerable groups and, conversely, to ensure the project contributes to advancing inclusion and equity.

In practical terms, mainstreaming has multiple aspects (Figure 1). GEDSI mainstreaming does not follow a process, as many of the aspects are iterative and link with other aspects. As such it can be hard to know what aspect to think about and what to do when. To address this, **we recommend that as MTT project teams refine grant applications (and throughout the project period) teams may want to think in terms of phases or parts of the project cycle, with each phase/part having concrete steps and considerations.** These steps and tips are outlined in Table 1 below (drawing on McDougall et al. 2021).^[v]

Figure 1: Aspects of GEDSI Mainstreaming



Tip: GEDSI integration should start in the conceptualization stage and continue appropriately through all project phases.

Table 1. GEDSI integration in FS and RR projects: step by step, by phase

Note: while shown here as a list, these ‘phases’ are NOT all linear, for example, and in particular, policy interfaces and communications is called ‘phase 5’, but of course would start very early and continue through the whole project, especially in MTT projects that are collaboration, policy-oriented or even transdisciplinary.

Phase 1: Problem identification and overall project design

1. Include a **GEDSI specialist or scientist** in the project team and establish equitable partnerships, with gender balance and diversity in both.
2. Ensure GEDSI-related activities are **adequately resourced** in the FS or RR budget.
3. Apply an **intersectional GEDSI lens in identifying and framing the project objectives and outcomes**, engaging diverse actors as needed. Critically assess scales, surface how different genders and social groups perceive and are affected by the issue.
4. Identify key social inclusion, disability inclusion, and gender groups to prioritize and define project goals. To the extent possible and appropriate, **identify specific GEDSI outcomes using the Reach-Benefit-Empower-Transform (RBET) Framework**^[vii]. Align these with larger development goals.
5. Within the **research questions (FS) and project objectives (FS and RR)**, compare more and less powerful social groups and elucidate equity, **with inquiries such as: (i) needs and preferences; (ii) mechanisms and factors that enable or constrain GEDSI outcomes and equity; and (iii) what are the positive and negative effects of innovations or policies and how are they distributed.**
6. Generate the context- and topic-related GEDSI information that is needed to effectively inform and guide the project through a **GEDSI Scoping**, also known as a Stakeholder and Power Analysis or Target Group and Vulnerability Analysis. (see Box 1 below). This can include literature and/or rapid primary data studies. It is needed to refine, sharpen and correct assumptions and thus strengthen the problems, questions, goals and groups of interest as well as design and implementation. It also will be critical to identifying risks and avoid doing harm (and thus to Ethics). This may happen before the project Theory of Change or iteratively. It is useful to do it before creating the GEDSI Plan (Phase 2, Step 1)—noting that projects may decide they need to do follow-up gap filling and include this in the Plan.
7. **Ensure the project Theory of Change is explicitly GEDSI-integrated.** This includes by: specifying realistic gender outcomes (using the RBET framework) within the ToC; unpacking with stakeholders the assumptions within the ToC regarding gender and challenging them with information from 1.5 above and GEDSI expertise; and refining the ToC with corrected assumptions and strengthened, GEDSI-informed design (realistic pathways).
8. In identifying research or project implementation methods, design **fit-for-purpose combinations to address GEDSI dimensions of research questions (FS) or project objectives (RR) and plan how the research or project implementation processes can be inclusive and empowering.**

Phase 2: Detailed planning including setting up MEL

1. Develop a **GEDSI Plan (See Box 1 below)** with a GEDSI-integrated research (FS) or project (RR) implementation plan.
2. In designing and refining the MEL plan, make sure it is **GEDSI-responsive**:
 - indicators for baseline/endline and routine monitoring aligned with GEDSI outcomes (RBET);
 - an intersectional lens;
 - mechanisms to track unintended consequences;
 - gathering explanatory information.
3. (Develop) and recalibrate the **budget so it has enough funding for expertise and activities for gender outcomes** (as per ToC).
4. Assess **GEDSI and intersectional analysis capacities** of the team and develop a capacity building plan to address gaps. Include reflection on biases or blind spots and how to address them.

5. Conduct intersectional GEDSI capacity building early and over time for research and implementing partners and enumerator teams, using the ToC.
Phase 3: Implementation, monitoring and adapting
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collect disaggregated data, at relevant units of analysis, using (quantitative and qualitative) sampling design and enough power to allow the intended and effective intersectional GEDSI analysis. 2. Use GEDSI-responsive and inclusive data collection processes, designed to be empowering, and invest in building trust between local participants/co-researchers/ stakeholders and external researchers, project implementors. 3. Monitor (un)intended consequences (+/-) and risks on an ongoing basis (as part of MEL) to inform adaptive programming and avoid harm. 4. As appropriate, carry out participatory ongoing MEL processes, including tracking locally-developed equity-related indicators, assessment of emerging outcomes both intended and unintended. 5. Engage team and partners in regular interim MEL reflections, with GEDSI-balanced participation; probe if GEDSI assumptions still hold and gather explanatory information, and adapt project or research accordingly.
Phase 4: Analysis of data and interpretation of findings (FS) or Synthesis of existing information and interpretation (RR)
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start with descriptive GEDSI analysis and intersectional disaggregated data to identify differences and similarities between socially marginalized groups in relation to the project objectives or research questions. 2. Deepen analysis and generate insights by applying the intersectional GEDSI analysis four dimensions. [viii] <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sense-make, validate and share findings and their interpretation with participants, including less powerful ones. Enable gender and socially inclusive participation, with equitable access, ability to feedback or critique, and to use the information and co-generate implications for action if any. 2. Sense-make, validate and identify implications for action with partners, strategizing for scaling evidence and GEDSI outcomes. 3. If there is a final evaluation or impact assessment, follow through in applying the RBET framing. Derive and share explanatory insights about how the project influenced GEDSI outcomes.
Phase 5: Policy interfaces, communication of research insights and recommendations.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Building upon prior phases, phase 5 allows for a reflective process to document and share insights from the project where approaches, interventions, and/or strategies have been successful in opening or achieving inclusive policy pathways or outcomes. In that a strong GEDSI lens has been incorporated into the project and its research and/or engagement activities, capture learnings from the project that have had successful equity outcomes in terms of policy interfaces/policy processes/policy engagement and policy influence. This can be done through the MEL process, communications outputs (blog posts, research outputs, presentations), or in final reporting stages. 2. Check that participants and partners have, understand, and can use the findings, and follow through with bespoke communications products so that they can use and scale the findings to advance equity and equality.

3. In translating the findings and recommendations for use in the project reporting and wider outputs, **ensure the language around GEDSI is consistent and accurate**. Draw on the building blocks for intersectional GEDSI analysis and other concepts in this Guidance Note for support.
4. **Make explicit how findings and recommendations address externally identified GEDSI-focused challenges, needs and commitments, including up to national, regional, or global scales**. Share with relevant bodies and networks and do so in the relevant languages.
5. In all steps, **ensure communications are GEDSI-aware and follow best practices**, including avoiding language and images that reinforce gender, disability and ethnic stereotypes or otherwise perpetuate social marginalization.

All the steps above should be considered during proposal revisions and are important over the period of carrying out the projects; feel free to reach out to the GEDSI team (see Section III) with questions. Here as well as underscoring the importance of ensuring sufficient GEDSI capacity within the team (which will also help now in revisions), we unpack two of the critical foundational steps that will help each team set up for success during the early stages of the project. These are: i) the GEDSI Scoping (or Stakeholder and Power Analysis); and ii) the GEDSI Plan. These are described briefly in Box 1 here so that teams can have a sense of these as early stage steps as teams revise the applications. (NB Confirming again: these are not to be done during the application revision stage—rather just include the tasks in the application as part of the plans. They are to be included in the early stages of project implementation).

Box 1. GEDSI Plan and GEDSI Scoping in brief

The GEDSI Plan and GEDSI Scoping are key building blocks for the **implementation of a GEDSI lens** through the project phases of the FS and RR, which is a requirement MTT.

As a part of each FS or RR Project, project teams will create a **GEDSI Plan** for their project within two months of the project start date. This brief, but well-thought out and essential plan will guide the project over time to enable success. The Plan will indicate how the project will follow and apply the gender integration steps in each part or phase of its project, tailored to each project's unique goals, processes and contexts. The GEDSI Plan can be a short document (up to 5 pages), following the structure and responding to the GEDSI actions aligned with the 5 Project Phases provided above. This Plan can be a living document, and if assistance is required from GEDSI MTT advisors, it can be requested.

Carrying out a **GEDSI Scoping** (also known as a Stakeholder and Power Analysis) early in projects is recognized as best practice in research, development, and policy development. Conducting this analysis deepens, sharpens, and corrects assumptions and knowledge relating to marginalized groups and overall power relations, risks, and opportunities for the project. The insights strengthen the problems, questions, goals, and groups of interest as well as design and implementation. It also will be critical to identifying risks and avoid doing harm (and thus to Ethics). It is a small but essential step in each project setting up to meet its and MTT goals (as above: *inclusive processes, more effective and equitable policy...*).

GEDSI Scoping is needed in each project to map and understand complex power dynamics that underpin the WEC multi-scalar policy environment. Assessing relations and multiple dimensions of power in the given contexts contributes to several building blocks of success for FS and MTT projects including:

- *identifying negative forms of power, and the actors that constrain or block, positive change towards more inclusive WEC processes and more effective and equitable WEC policy;*
- *identifying and amplifying positive forms of power and enabling actors that drive positive change towards more inclusive WEC processes and more effective and equitable WEC policy;*
- *supporting people living in poverty and marginalization in having equitable voice in FS and RR projects and thus in shaping their own WEC and development pathways;*
- *enabling all MTT team members to be more aware of our own power and position as development professionals, researchers and organizations—and using this awareness to support alliances and momentum towards such change (adapted from Pettit, 2018)*

There is no specific methodology or template required for the GEDSI Scoping in MTT (although MTT GEDSI Advisors can offer templates and suggestions if needed). Rather, it can be designed around the project's aims, contexts, and resources, and can include literature and/or rapid primary data studies as fits the project. MTT projects may want to collaborate (with other MTT projects) on this if this are working in the same geographies. Projects should approach this as a rapid but relatively comprehensive stakeholder mapping and assessment of power in relation to their given topic and contexts. This should take place in the first 3 months of the project (produced as a short GEDSI Scoping report); identified gaps can then be filled and the understanding iteratively sharpened (via the standard, ongoing use of disaggregated data and an intersectional GEDSI lens in ongoing analysis and interpretation, see Table 1), in order to arrive at a sharp and more comprehensive picture for including in final outputs and engagements of and lessons from the project.

This Scoping may happen before the project Theory of Change or iteratively. It is useful to do it before creating the GEDSI Plan (Phase 2, Step 1)—noting that projects may decide they need to do follow-up gap filling and include this in the Plan.

IV Next Steps and Resources

Application revision stage

- i. Please address all specific GEDSI-related comments as provided to each project, drawing on this Guidance Note to help address these.
- ii. In the application revisions, include the relevant GEDSI steps (actions) identified in Table 1 above as they fit and adapted to your project.
- iii. In particular, in indicating timelines and outputs, make sure to specifically indicate re these project deliverables: the required **GEDSI Plan** should be delivered within the first 2 months of starting the project; the required **GEDSI Scoping** should be delivered within the first 3 months of

project start. (Noting that these and the GEDSI Scoping's embedded power analysis will be living documents, continue to be refined over the course of the whole project).

Have GEDSI-related questions now? Need support during application revisions?

- i. Make sure you book a 1-1 appointment for Jan 15th (as per the Jan 11th online meeting for project proponents)—there will be a GEDSI advisor in those sessions
- ii. Feel free to reach out to MTT GEDSI Advisors to receive feedback on project application revisions prior to submission to the MTT secretariat. Email: [[Karen and Sie]]

Once projects start: GEDSI Workshops

- ❑ Once projects are underway, GEDSI Guidance will be made available to MTT project teams (together) through on-line mini workshops/trainings. This includes a 2-part online workshop to support teams to work through the Gender Scoping and how to carry out power analysis. These will be part of and dovetail with the overall MTT learning and networking opportunities, and potentially link with/be supported by MTT Fellows, as noted in the January 11th online meeting with shortlisted project proponents.
- ❑ Ongoing reflections on GEDSI integration and outcomes will be generated by each team as part of their regular MEL—we can facilitate opportunities for cross-sharing if there is interest between projects. Finally, an end-of project on-line session will support sharing knowledge and approaches to implementing GEDSI in RR and FS projects.

^[ii] MTT Consortium. 2022. Mekong Think Tanks Program Design Document. Bangkok: SEI. Pg 13.

^[iii] Ibid, pg 13.

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

^[iv] Ibid, pg 9.

^[v] Adapted from : McDougall C, Newton J, Kruijssen F and Reggers A. 2021. Gender integration and intersectionality in food systems research for development: A guidance note. Penang, Malaysia: CGIAR Research Program on Fish Agri-Food Systems. Manual: FISH-2021-26.

^[vi] The Reach-Benefit-Empower-Transform (RBET) framework helps clarify project objectives by asking researchers to distinguish between approaches that **reach** socially marginalized participants, such as by including them in program activities; those that **benefit** socially marginalized individuals or groups, by improving their circumstances in some way; those that **empower** socially marginalized individuals or groups, by strengthening their ability to make and put into action strategic life choices; and those that **transform** relations for socially marginalized individuals or groups across scales, such as by changing attitudes at the community or policy levels. The RBET framework can serve as an initial analysis for developing the project's power analysis.

^[vii] For conducting a comprehensive GEDSI analysis, see: DFAT (October 2023). **GENDER EQUALITY, DISABILITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION ANALYSIS** GOOD PRACTICE NOTE available at:

<https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/gender-equality-disability-social-inclusion-analysis-good-practice-note.pdf>

Pettit, Jethro (2013). POWER ANALYSIS: A PRACTICAL GUIDE. The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA) document reference: SIDA61639en; available at:

https://usaidelearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/power-analysis-a-practical-guide_3704.pdf