



INFORMATION NOTE

Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion Insights

Introduction:

This information note provides insights from projects within the Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) portfolio on how they have addressed key Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) considerations. It offers applicants and projects examples from a range of contexts and is designed to facilitate shared learning across the BCFs portfolio.

The aim of this document is to build a stronger shared understanding of GEDSI requirements and to better support applicants and projects in meeting the minimum GEDSI standard. Please note the examples included are project-specific and do not provide a one-size fits all approach to GEDSI. All projects should conduct a GEDSI Analysis to inform their approach.

Summary of GEDSI requirements:

All projects funded under the BCFs (Darwin Initiative, Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund, and Darwin Plus) are required to demonstrate that they have considered GEDSI appropriately within their design and implementation.

All BCFs projects are required to meet the minimum standard of GEDSI-Sensitive.

A project's approach to GEDSI will be assessed at the application stage, and will be regularly assessed within their Annual and Final Reports. BCFs GEDSI requirements and guidance on how to conduct a GEDSI Analysis can be found on the Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion page under Resources on all three BCFs websites ([Darwin Initiative](#), [IWT Challenge Fund](#), and [Darwin Plus](#)).

The GEDSI assessment is based on the following criteria:

GEDSI Scale	Description
Not yet sensitive	The GEDSI context may have been considered but the project isn't quite meeting the requirements of a 'sensitive' approach.
Sensitive	The GEDSI context has been considered, and project activities take this into account in their design and implementation. The project addresses basic needs and vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups, and the project will not contribute to or create further inequalities.
Empowering	The project has all the characteristics of a 'sensitive' approach whilst also increasing equal access to assets, resources, and capabilities for women and marginalised groups.
Transformative	The project has all the characteristics of an 'empowering' approach whilst also addressing unequal power relationships and seeking institutional and societal change.



Credit: ECDD

Project Contribution

The following projects have contributed to this information note.

Fund	Project Reference	Project Title	Lead Organisation	Project Leader
Darwin Initiative	30-019	Building resilient landscapes and communities for Rukiga's cranes and wetlands	Margaret Pyke Trust	Kathryn Lloyd
Darwin Initiative	DARNV016	Promoting equitable gender norms to strengthen conservation governance and impact	Fauna & Flora International (FFI)	Helen Anthem
IWT Challenge Fund	IWT127	Conservation Litigation & Wildlife (CLAW)	Lancaster Environment Centre, Lancaster University	Jacob Phelps
Darwin Plus	DPLUS191	Enabling invasive plant eradications and long-term management in Tristan	Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)	David Kinchin-Smith
Darwin Plus	DPLUS192	Delivering biodiversity and human well-being gains for Montserrat's sustainable development	UK Overseas Territories Conservation Forum (UKOTCF)	Catherine Wensink



Credit: Robi Kasianus

How do you approach conducting a GEDSI Analysis?

Kathryn Lloyd (30-019):

Our GEDSI Analysis was deeply embedded in our approach from the start. We knew, through long-term knowledge of Ugandan partners working locally, that poverty was exacerbating threats to wetlands and cranes but we wanted to find out more about the specific drivers of these threats, so we could respond to them holistically. We therefore partnered with an academic institute ([London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine](#)) experienced in qualitative research, particularly in assessing the social issues people are facing, through a gender lens¹, and the impact programmes have on them.

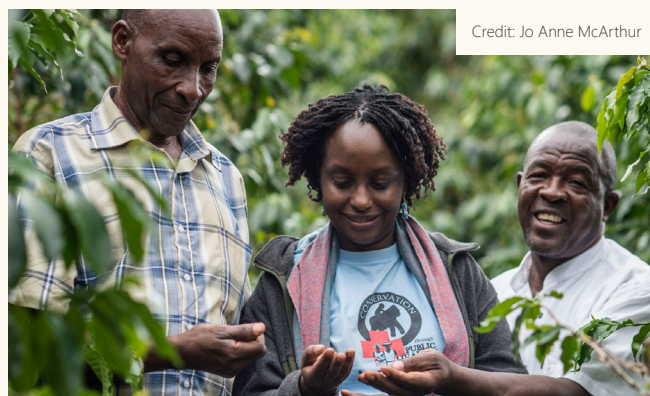
Our GEDSI Analysis was also informed by a comprehensive literature review. We reviewed Uganda's commitments to international frameworks (e.g. on biodiversity and gender equality) and explored how local norms around land inheritance, family planning, and gender roles affect rights in practice. For example, our consultations highlighted that women often have limited access to family planning information and services, with implications for both health and land pressure. In addition, we found that Uganda's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) refers to human population increase, gender inequality, and poverty as drivers of wetland biodiversity loss, and that wetlands are rapidly being degraded for agricultural land and urban settlement. The NBSAP also recognises the connections between these issues for wetland biodiversity and poverty reduction.

¹ A gender lens is a way of looking at social issues to understand the gendered power relations and address the different impacts on people of different genders.

We [Margaret Pyke Trust] believe that taking an integrated approach (i.e. seeking to understand the issues that different people and groups are facing and how they intersect) is the only way to ensure sustainable outcomes are achieved. In our project, we integrated messages and actions linking people's health, environmental health, and livelihoods, which decreased poverty, environmental degradation, and rates of domestic violence, while increasing levels of income, savings, and good health.

Helen Anthem (DARNV016):

Often, projects get in a consultant to do a GEDSI Analysis and develop a Gender Action Plan, and often because of timing, staff aren't engaged enough, so there's not always a lot of buy in to the analysis or the plan. Or you see some cases where the Gender Action Plan is seen as the responsibility of a gender focal point person (if the project has one). It's seen as their responsibility rather than all project staff responsibility. So, I think that's quite important to try and get over that hurdle. It is important to recognise that staff come with their own kind of biases, and that it's an ongoing process, carrying out a gender analysis. It should not be seen as a one-off activity document and then that's it.



Credit: Jo Anne McArthur



Credit: Shallow Marine Survey Group



Credit: Anthony Kariuki Macharia

How do you ensure you are not exacerbating any inequalities when engaging with local communities?

Catherine Wensink (DPLUS192):

Barriers to participation – such as digital exclusion, lack of transport, caregiving roles and power imbalances – have been identified for the context of this project. The following steps were taken to address these: offering printed and verbal communication for those without digital access; avoiding tokenism by creating space for all voices to be heard, especially underrepresented ones by providing opportunities to engage at various levels and in various ways; and enhancing organisational capacity to be more inclusive, through receiving a successful grant for transportation to provide opportunities for those without transport to attend events. Feedback loops were built into the engagement and knowledge sharing processes to ensure communities could voice concerns and help shape engagement approaches throughout.

Kathryn Lloyd (30-019):

The analysis of our qualitative research and GEDSI Analysis uncovered two main pathways that were driving inequality, poverty and environment, and health and livelihood issues. We used this information to feedback into our programme design, to ensure we were not only responding to each driver but also not inadvertently exacerbating issues.

The issue of domestic violence was only uncovered through our GEDSI Analysis/qualitative research, highlighting the importance of following this approach.

We saw it was a cross-cutting issue affecting the success of all project actions, so we sought guidance from experts regarding how to ensure our programme design did not inadvertently exacerbate issues for people affected by domestic violence, which fed into programme design.

What GEDSI-related challenges have you experienced within your project context?

Jacob Phelps (IWT127):

We are facilitating the use of environmental liability provisions that hold offenders of IWT offences liable for remedying the many type of harms they cause. For example, to species survival, to human wellbeing and diverse values, to economic livelihoods. The primary GEDSI related challenges, and the solutions we implemented in response to these, are listed below:

Challenge: The legal profession, particularly in the Global South, is often very male dominated. As such, the legal practitioners we are able to recruit are often men. We do our best to recruit women, while also seeking the best candidates, and have managed to recruit exceptional colleagues and have a strongly balanced team.

Solution: We looked for excellent lawyers via our social networks to ensure that we could identify topic-appropriate, kind, collaborative colleagues. And throughout this we kept in mind that we would look to recruit women, wherever possible and well matched.

Challenge: It is often challenging to have clear, sensitive communication across cultural groups, where there are different approaches, expectations, standards of politeness, and levels of what is appropriate.

This has led to misunderstandings and some disagreements, although given the very international profile of our core team and network we have managed this fairly well.

Solution: [To enable sensitive communication across cultural groups] we included a multi-day, in-person meeting into the project budget early in the project that included technical aspects and team-building, because we wanted to ensure people on the project know one other, have a sense of community, are comfortable with open communication, and have a sense of shared purpose. Our core team is very international and experienced working across cultural and country boundaries, and so has the soft skills.

Challenge: Law and lawyers tend to have a strong economic view of the world, which tends to overlook other, non-financial types of values for nature. Because our approach is interested in the diverse types of harm that IWT offences cause, we have often had to actively highlight these other values, which conflicts with these mainstream economic views.

Solution: We have often had a difficult time convincing lawyers of this more inclusive approach. We have done this through attrition - simply repeating our points in multiple ways, through various examples and repeated by different colleagues. Although the concept often faces some resistance / lack of familiarity, but we regularly make progress in advancing this point.

We also decided to write an academic paper specifically on this topic because we think it is such an important outcome of the project work, and think we can influence broader debates. This paper is currently under consideration for publishing.

The GEDSI element here is because the economic focus on nature is, in many contexts, often associated with a narrow focus on men's income-generating livelihoods from natural resources. Other types of valuing nature (e.g. sense of place, cultural importance, non-monetized ecosystem services) are important to all people, but also often have particular importance to marginalised communities, including women. Making sure that these aspects get attention is important to formal, legal recognition of these values.

David Kinchin-Smith (DPLUS191):

The conservation department of Tristan da Cunha is largely male-dominated so training opportunities have been skewed by this. However, by opening up training opportunities to the Agriculture Department as well, with a more even gendered team, there has been less of a bias.

The New Zealand Flax team lead, although not Tristanian, is a woman and delivers rope access training sessions to youngsters in the community. We hope that this will serve as inspiration to the next generation of women on Tristan that opportunities are open to all.

Top Tips:

- Start early: rushing engagement risks replicating existing inequalities and eroding trust.
- Use your GEDSI analysis to inform project design: to ensure participants are engaged meaningfully, use your GEDSI Analysis to inform how activities are designed and how project implementation is framed.
- Use trusted facilitators as intermediaries: work with local leaders and community-based organisations who already have the trust of the community which often includes marginalised groups.
- Be flexible: traditional timelines and formats may not suit everyone; adapt these based on who you're trying to include.
- Don't assume silence is consent: use multiple feedback mechanisms and check back often to ensure people feel safe and heard.

Credit: University of Oxford - Plants

