



Netherlands Commission for  
Environmental Assessment



## Gender in environmental assessment

**Gender** refers to socially constructed (so learnt and variable) roles and power relations between men and women. Due to different roles, activities and knowledge, women and men's concerns differ. **Gender equality** does not erase these differences, but ensures equal societal status, opportunities, and benefits from resources. Complete gender equality is difficult to achieve. In many cultures men take decisions, affecting both women and men. Women, especially poor women, often have fewer opportunities and less access to resources such as land and loans. Gender equality is not only about women; yet empowering women is often required to achieve it.

Also in projects, plans and policies, men's needs and priorities often (unconsciously) get more weight than women's. **Integrating gender equality** is a strategy to address concerns and experiences of both men and women in such activities. It entails assessing implications of planned actions for women and men to enhance gender equality and project success. Ideally, attention is paid to women and men of different socio-economic groups, age, ethnicity, etcetera.

This key sheet shows how environmental assessment can promote gender equality and how it can benefit from integrating gender considerations.

### Why integrate gender in ESIA/SEA?

Environmental assessment is a systematic process that aims to ensure that the environmental and social consequences of proposed actions are incorporated into decision making. We distinguish environmental and social impact assessment (ESIA, for projects) and strategic environmental assessment (SEA, for programmes, plans and policies). The socio-economic environment is an important

component in ESIA and SEA. This environment may differ for women and men due to their roles, concerns and opportunities (see Example).

### Example: Bagan project ESIA

The Bagan River Multipurpose Beautification Project in Myanmar is planned to improve the navigability of the Irrawaddy river. The project also has some secondary objectives, including irrigation.

The NCEA advised on Terms of Reference (ToR) for the project ESIA (2015) and reviewed the resulting ESIA report (2016). In both cases, a gender expert was part of the NCEA working group.

In its advice on ToR, the NCEA recommended to pay attention to gendered agricultural practices and their relation with irrigation. Changing production options could also affect female and male farmers and labourers differently. To account for this, the NCEA recommended to use a Multi Criteria Analysis for the social and economic assessment, to value the changes of services for men and women.

After finalisation of the (draft) ESIA, the NCEA noted that although some gender information was included, it was haphazard and of insufficient quality. It was recommended to improve this in the final ESIA, by going from *presentation* of gender data to their *analysis* and *integration* in the project plan. Specific suggestions were given for this.

When the final ESIA will become available, the NCEA expects to do a final review. Project implementation will then show the extent to which gender is really incorporated in the project.

In environmental assessment it is 'smart economics' to involve both women and men, and to consider their different viewpoints. Understanding their various uses of the environment creates a more complete image of positive and negative effects of a planned activity. Moreover, women's and men's different knowledge on environmental sustainability can enrich opportunities for mitigation.

### Gender in the ESIA/SEA process

To integrate gender in environmental assessment, it is often not sufficient to simply ask women's opinions on the proposed project. Because of women's backgrounds and societal norms, 'regular' means for public participation in an ESIA/SEA process may not suffice (see Box). In order to make sure that the *content* of an ESIA/SEA (report) reflects gender considerations, it is crucial to pay attention to gender first of all in the setup of the ESIA/SEA *process*. Various stages of environmental assessment offer different opportunities for integrating gender equality.

- **Scoping:** identify key gender issues.
- **Terms of Reference:** indicate the need to collect gender-specific and sex-disaggregated data; ensure gender expertise and gender balance of the team. The latter improves consideration of multiple perspectives. In some cultures only female data collectors can interview women. Use networks of female professionals if no suitable team members are available.
- **Baseline data collection:** collect gender-specific data on work within and out of the household, time use, and decision-making. All socio-economic data should be sex-disaggregated, to identify different concerns.
- **Impact identification:** conduct a gender analysis; identify positive/negative effects on women and men.
- **Public consultation:** ensure meaningful participation of men and women from different groups. Consider cultural gender perceptions: Who speaks? Would separate meetings for men and women improve participation? If women do not speak out, women's groups could speak with a united voice. Identify suitable meeting times and venues based on data on gendered tasks and time use.
- **Mitigation measures:** include measures to address the identified adverse impacts on both women and men.
- **Environmental management plan:** include a gender action plan or gender strategy.
- **Monitoring and impact measurement:** use gender-sensitive indicators for identified impacts, measuring outcomes for women and men. Use participatory monitoring mechanisms for women and men.

### Women's challenges in public participation

*"Even when women are participants in formal decision making processes, their interests are rarely taken into account due to gender-related inequalities and restrictive definitions of appropriate female behaviour. They are often discouraged from speaking in public fora by norms of female decorum. Women usually have less time to participate due to a heavier burden of work, which includes household tasks and childcare in addition to income generation or home-based agricultural production. Because of their inequitable upbringing and unequal access to education, as well as cultural and social norms, women often have less experience expressing their views confidently. In addition, they may be reluctant to invest time in participation, based on a strategic calculation that they have little to gain from doing so – particularly if "participation" is limited to token consultation."*

UNEP (2016): Global Gender and Environment Outlook

### The NCEA's approach

In the 1990s, the NCEA noticed that ESIA reports did not sufficiently integrate power relations, partly due to a focus on quantitative techniques, and advocated for integration of among others gender issues. This proves to be of great added value, particularly for projects on water and sanitation, waste, agriculture, forestry and fishing.

Gender integration is a prerequisite for NCEA's activities since practice shows that ESIA/SEA offers unique opportunities for gender equality improvement. The NCEA also aims at gender balanced teams and includes gender experience when relevant.

The NCEA has developed a checklist on gender integration in ESIA/SEA for its technical secretaries and experts. It also updated its expert database with gender specialists and women professionals.

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