

Promoting gender equality through the Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio

The Australian Government funded Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio (SDIP) seeks to respond to major regional development challenges in South Asia - improving transboundary water resource management, increasing access to energy, and increasing agricultural productivity and farm incomes. The SDIP geographical focus is on the three major Himalayan river basins: the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra. Central to this is the Portfolio's goal of promoting gender equality and improving women and girls' livelihoods in the face of challenges including water resource development and climate change adaptation.

Promoting diversity and supporting women in decision-making processes

A key challenge for gender integration within the areas of water science and water governance is the lack of gender balance in institutions. This is a concern within both developed and developing countries. Whilst the inclusion of women does not automatically translate into gender sensitive scientific analysis and planning, having a more balanced gender ratio of male and female staff is a starting step towards gender equality and diversity.

Within the SDIP, we have been working with partners in India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh to increase diversity (with emphasis on women, as well as early to mid-career staff) in the trainees who attend capacity-building workshops. As part of this work, CSIRO has been providing mentoring and support to female hydrologists in Pakistan, Nepal and India. In Nepal, CSIRO is supporting women leaders' participation at SDIP partners' decision-making processes, through engaging with the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare to be part of the Committee that advises on CSIRO's activities.

Connecting water management with gender impact

Improving gender outcomes requires understanding what communities' gender specific needs are, as expressed by the communities themselves. To do this, CSIRO works closely with our partners. An example is the engagement with the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) and Indian NGO Pradan to learn from women farmers about their farming practices and water needs.

Having this knowledge informs our water resource modelling work by providing the linkage between irrigation and water needs at the local scale (e.g. farm or village) and the water resource policy and planning scale. It informs our understanding of how policy initiatives affect different groups, especially marginalised people.



We also work with decision makers and technical scientists to ensure our work is gender-sensitive and can support policy recommendations. This includes:

- reviewing how alternative water supply and allocation policies might impact on gender and different income groups
- developing an Indus framework that makes gender and water connections at all levels and scales (i.e. from household, district, provincial to national), with feedback and collaboration sought from our SDIP partners.

Capturing gender outcomes in monitoring & evaluation

What constitutes 'successful outcomes' for gender equality within a project? Drawing on existing research and good practice, CSIRO and ICIMOD (Nepal) are working on developing a set of gender-sensitive indicators that are measurable and appropriate to context.

Gender equality or gender equity?

At its broadest definition, gender equality is the equal treatment of men and women. In the context of a workshop training, this means everyone is treated in the same way, and given the same amount of opportunities and resources. But in real life, each individual has different needs, responsibilities, access to resources and decision-making powers which are context-specific.

Gender equity approach, then, is to ensure gender-specific needs and differences are identified and addressed, especially where these differences lead to unequal outcomes and marginalisation.

The future: opportunities ahead for CSIRO and partners

Research

- Research and analyse the linkages between changes in water management and associated biophysical and socio-economic impacts, and what this means for gender relations, involving women in water management, women and girls' rights, as well as those of other marginalised groups
- Considerable gender research exists for the local scale (e.g. village or household). The question is how to link this with CSIRO's work, as well as higher level governmental/ institutional engagement
- Strengthening our work on the nexus of water-food-energy and the overarching gender implications, as well as the impact of climate change.

Science-informed policy

- Science is not just research, it is also about using evidence-based findings to support policy initiatives. The conceptual gap between what is done at the water modelling level, and how this affects communities needs to be bridged. This way we can better formulate

narratives around broad scale change and what this will mean in everyday life contexts for women and girls, men and boys.

Measuring and documenting change

- Linking to the themes of research and policy is – how we measure the positive change in gender equality and our role in it
- Part of CSIRO's efforts in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality is through opening up training opportunities for female mid-career engineers and scientists. We will support our network of trainees and build an understanding of the impact of their learning opportunities through SDIP, especially any challenges encountered
- As part of integrating gender into our monitoring and evaluation, we will embark on a learning by doing process to explore and test how gender impacts can be measured and quantified.

We have much to learn from our work, our partners and from the diverse range of stakeholders. It is from working and learning together, that we can all make a contribution towards supporting women and girls' empowerment, equality and right to development.



CONTACT US

t 1300 363 400
+61 3 9545 2176
e csiroenquiries@csiro.au
w www.csiro.au

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

CSIRO Land and Water
Dr Joyce Wu
Research Fellow, Gender Integration
t +61 2 6246 5617
e joyce.wu@csiro.au

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