

Gender equity and the Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio

The Sustainable Development Investment Portfolio (SDIP) is an Australian government initiative aiming to improve water, food and energy security in the major Himalayan river basins of South Asia. It supports climate resilient livelihoods and economic growth, benefitting the poor and vulnerable, particularly women and girls.

As an SDIP partner, CSIRO has been working with counterparts in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Nepal to understand the gender specific needs of communities to inform water resource modelling, ultimately aiming to link the local scale with the water resource policy and planning scale.

The challenge

There is no single universal strategy for gender integration that will enhance water, food and energy security across South Asia. Instead, we need to gain an understanding of gender differences in roles, resources and constraints in differing contexts across South Asia, and the barriers and opportunities that can be addressed for our research to have greatest impact.

Our response

Connecting water management with gender impact

Improving gender outcomes requires an understanding of the gender specific needs of communities as expressed by the communities themselves.

Working closely with our partners, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research and Indian non-government organisation, Pradan, we have learnt about the farming practices and water needs of women farmers.

Working with the Bangladesh Agricultural University we have explored how climate change adaptation practices have both positive and unintended negative gender impacts on division of labour, access to natural resources and livelihoods.

Integrating this knowledge with water resource modelling aims to link irrigation and water needs at the local scale (e.g. farm or village) with the water resource policy and planning scale. It informs our understanding of how policy initiatives affect different groups, especially marginalised people.

Pakistan water policy planning

Working with decision makers and technical scientists we aim to bring a gender-sensitive approach to analysing policy impacts.

For example, reviewing how alternative water supply and water allocation policies may impact marginalised groups,

men and women; requiring a deeper understanding of inequality and systemic change issues.

We are also fostering research collaboration opportunities, especially with universities and organisations with gender and environmental portfolios, ensuring diverse representation of voices and concerns in our work.



Gathering wheat, Nepal

Scale

Scale can be a difficult issue to address. However, lessons from our partners and our research shows experiences and knowledge from the 'micro' scale help inform the overall picture or 'macro' scale of water resource management. Results and impacts will be measured in how our work is changing people's lives.



Woman fishing, Nepal

Integrating gender in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, work with local government, civil society and university partners focuses on interdisciplinary collaboration because social, economic and gender concerns in relation to water are complex and cross-cutting.

We are working with the Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) to understand the gender, economic and social aspects of water, to inform water modelling and climate change response.

Our work with the BAU is also supporting a younger generation of researchers; providing research opportunities, gender advice and resources.

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. Having a more balanced gender ratio of male and female staff is a first step towards gender equality and diversity.

In Nepal we have been working with the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD) to explore the water-gender-livelihoods nexus in the Koshi Basin, focusing on how livelihood strategies are gendered, and how policies and interventions can be created to be more gender-aware and sensitive to these needs.

A particular impact of this work has been the inclusion of female leaders, engaged through the Ministry of Women, Children and Social Welfare, in a Joint Advisory Committee to guide the direction of CSIRO's research activities in the region.

Gender outcomes in monitoring and evaluation

Drawing on existing research and good practice, CSIRO and ICIMOD, Nepal developed a set of gender-sensitive indicators that are measurable and appropriate to context. In developing these indicators some important lessons have emerged: i) the importance of empowering all SDIP practitioners to engage with gender, ii) translating gendered outcomes across scales and understanding networks of influence, and iii) recognising that every indicator has a cost.

Over the course of SDIP Phase II, we intend to test and refine this framework and in turn influence the gender capacity of our own organisations. We are also aiming to improve the way we capture evidence of changes in gender inequality.

The future: opportunities ahead for CSIRO and partners

We are on a learning journey, which includes understanding and challenging assumptions and norms in ourselves and our work, as well as ensuring our research priorities are mutually identified by local partners.

We strive to identify mechanisms for meaningful integration of gender into basin planning and water modelling.

We aim to do this by using evidence-based findings to support policy initiatives. Creating whole of system scenarios for basin planning will increase the potential for uptake and impact from our decision support tools. This way we can better assess the potential changes resulting from scenarios and how they may impact everyday life for women and girls, men and boys.

Another 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.



The CSIRO SDIP project team maintains an up-to-date website for sharing material and news on project activities. <https://research.csiro.au/sdip>

CONTACT US

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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This fact sheet designed and implemented by CSIRO contributes to the South Asia SDIP and is supported by the Australian aid program.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

CSIRO Land and Water
Shahriar Wahid
t +61 2 6246 4155
e shahriar.wahid@csiro.au
w <https://research.csiro.au/sdip>