

Gender, development and sustainability – 2017 update

Gender differences and disparities in access to and control over natural resources are well documented. Yet, in development policy and practice, gender issues are often neglected. Many interventions fail to recognize gender and social differences or offer simplistic solutions.

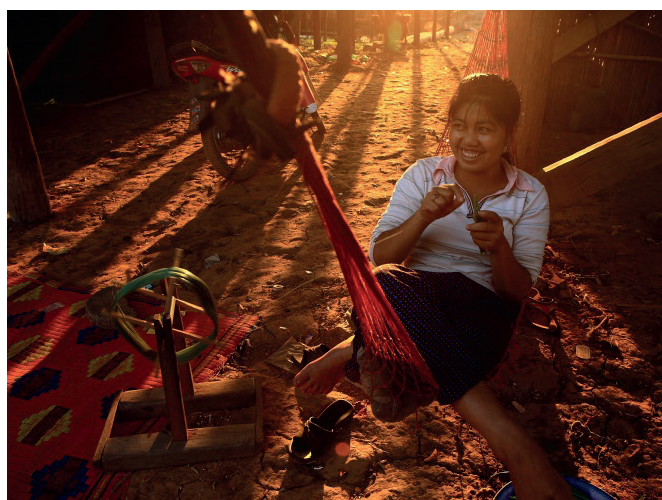
SEI has made it a priority to address gender and social equity across its work and to help address gaps in knowledge and policy from the local to the global scale. Through the Gender and Social Equity (GSE) Programme, launched in 2016, SEI is funding innovative research on gender and equity in environment and development, while working to integrate these issues in SEI's research, policy outreach and capacity-building efforts. Our goal is to help establish a strong shared vision that is gender- and socially inclusive, and bring that vision to bear through our partnerships, networks and alliances.

This synthesis brief presents insights from SEI research, through the GSE Programme and beyond, that has sought to narrow the gaps between knowledge, policy and practice on gender issues. We also describe some of our major activities to support this work and explore directions for the future.

Key insights

- ***Despite new opportunities for participation and gender mainstreaming, unequal power relations and persistent stereotypes continue to exclude and disadvantage women.***

Policies and institutions can further entrench gender inequality by formalizing unequal power relations. SEI's ongoing research in Cambodia and Vietnam under the Mekong Partnership for Environment project, for instance, finds women are not well represented in stakeholder engagement processes such as environmental impact assessments (EIAs). This limits their say on socially and environmentally important decisions such as the approval of dams, landfill sites and village relocations. A forthcoming SEI report explores gender and public participation in EIAs and makes recommendations for a gender-inclusive regional standard for EIAs.¹



A woman in a village in Siem Reap province, Cambodia, repairs her fishing gear.

Even when political changes lead to greater inclusion, women's social advancements lag behind those of men. In Nepal, for instance, political changes led to more inclusive and secure access to irrigation water for all. This positive change was brought about by the inclusion of men from formerly excluded middle- and lower-caste groups in irrigation decision-making bodies. However, women continued to face constraints on their participation, and many women from middle and lower castes are still being excluded.²



A woman in Siem Reap province, Cambodia, tends to her home garden.

Gender disparities in informal interactions between men and women can also limit the benefits of development programmes. In Siem Reap and Battambang provinces in Cambodia, SEI is investigating how formal and informal power relations and gender roles affect women managing vegetable gardens. A home gardens project of the World Vegetable Center aims to combat malnutrition by providing women with vegetable seed kits for home gardens. Our study aims to improve the project's design, implementation and monitoring, so it empowers women and does not just use them as conduits.³

- ***Gender inequality intersects with other forms of inequality on multiple scales, and climate change adaptation and mitigation initiatives need to address it accordingly.***

Social groups within communities are not singular and isolated entities – they are diverse networks, comprising people of different ages, ethnicities and social classes. To be effective, programmes must take this diversity into account, even within communities that are already recognized as highly vulnerable. For example, people with disabilities are particularly at risk during disasters and are four times likelier to die than people without disabilities. Disabled women and girls face higher risks than men, due to displacement and unsafe shelters.⁴

It is also important to take a multiscale (national, subnational, community, households) and multidimensional (gender, class, age) approach when analysing how a decline in resources affects different groups. A study of Ky Nam commune in Central Vietnam found that that even within groups of women, differences in class, household headship, age and stage of life affected access to water,

forest land and credit. Female heads of households were more likely to be marginalized. SEI also examined the impact of national policies on the commune and found they were likely to exacerbate the vulnerabilities of female-headed households.⁵

SEI is also raising awareness of the multiple dimensions of inequality in the context of climate finance. Our research is highlighting the implications of gender “blindness” in the design, expenditure and outcomes of climate finance. A pilot study in Lao PDR is tracking how much money is allocated to addressing gender and social equity in climate projects. We plan to scale out the findings to highlight often-unrecognized patterns in climate finance.

- ***Women’s contributions to the economy are frequently overlooked, but recognizing women’s role in building a “green economy” could yield large benefits.***

In sub-Saharan Africa, two-thirds of the people cook with traditional biomass. Women, who often collect woodfuel and are also most affected by smoky stoves, can play a key part in modernizing energy systems. SEI is exploring how energy programmes in Africa are designed and implemented, and how women fit in. Recognizing women’s central role in transforming energy systems and building small businesses to deliver modern energy services can advance gender equity and poverty eradication, and drive inclusive economic growth.⁶

More broadly, women’s contributions to new “green” economic activities are essential for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and responding to global and local environmental threats. Both climate- and development-focused debates increasingly highlight the “green economy” as the way forward, but women’s position in this is rarely discussed. We need to understand how gendered employment norms and practices may shape women’s inclusion in and potential gains from green jobs.

SEI is supporting research on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that are transitioning towards a green economy, exploring the extent to which they are considering gender and social equity



A woman in Kiambu County, Kenya, uses twigs and kerosene to light her improved cookstove.

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A young woman intern at the Estonian Crop Research Institute works on a grass harvester.

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issues. The goal is to help ensure that “greening” entrepreneurial initiatives are inclusive and equitable.⁷

SEI research on the Estonian bioeconomy, meanwhile, shows that in the agriculture sector, where more women are employed, the gender pay gap is particularly wide, even between men and women doing the same work. Indeed, although more women than men complete bioeconomy-related degrees (agriculture and forestry), in Estonia both these sectors are dominated by men.⁸

- ***Significant data gaps make it difficult to address gender issues in natural resource management. Decision-makers need better gender-related and disaggregated data, and technical models need to incorporate gender and equity considerations.***

The SDGs, including Goal 5 (gender equality) and cross-cutting concerns, offer opportunities to better address gender and social equity issues in development research, policy and practice. However, it is still unclear how well the SDGs and their measurable indicators capture the complexities of gender and social inequities in development efforts. SEI is designing gender-sensitive research tools and monitoring indicators to try to fill this gap. Lessons learned will help guide governments to deliver on their commitments in gender-responsive ways.⁹

Environmental programmes focused on technical analysis (e.g. of water or energy systems) generally fail to address gender and social inequities. Given the key role of such models in guiding policy and planning, it is crucial that they recognize disparities and unfair power structures and take a more inclusive approach that addresses the needs and priorities of all social groups.

SEI is exploring ways to mainstream gender and social equity considerations into modelling-based research and capacity-building activities – for instance, those using SEI’s LEAP (Long-range Energy Alternatives Planning) and WEAP (Water Evaluation and Planning) systems. Modellers supporting natural resource management increasingly want to include gender and social equity considerations, but they often lack the data or the expertise needed to do so. SEI is preparing guidance for modellers to help them address this challenge.¹⁰

In addition, as part of the SERVIR-Mekong Programme,¹¹ SEI is working with women’s organizations, geospatial specialists and NGOs to support the integration of gender and social equity considerations in geographic information systems (GIS). The GIS tools being developed for SERVIR will inform natural resource management, disaster risk reduction and climate change resilience-



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Diana Morales, an early-career technical modelling professional hired as a contractor by SEI, explains analysis done in Colombia to Franklin Ruiz, of the Office of Meteorology at IDEAM.

building efforts. Incorporating gender-analytical information can help achieve more sustainable development by ensuring that gender and social equity concerns are addressed.¹² The GIS tools can also be used to raise awareness of how current policies and practices may be neglecting gender issues, and to highlight gender-unequal risks.

The SERVIR work builds on insights from a previous project on geospatial mapping of gendered aspects of water management and agriculture in the Mekong basin.¹³ Spatially referenced information on gender is scarce, particularly in the agriculture and water sectors. The maps produced through this project show how gender affects resource access and use in the river basin, provide new evidence for analysis of disparities and of development opportunities related to water and agriculture.

Other major activities

SEI staff are active in gender debates across a wide range of policy and academic forums, speaking extensively on these issues at major international and regional events, expert group meetings and participating in panels on gender and social equity. Notably, SEI has consistently been engaged in the Asia-Pacific region with the Asia-Pacific Climate Change Adaptation (gender and climate change adaptation at different scales) Forum and the Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE) Mekong Forum on Water, Food and Energy (gender and “big data”). Most recently, SEI has forged partnerships with fisheries networks through Aquafish, and with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Regional Development Mission in Asia on climate-resilient development and clean power in Asia.

Major donors and policy-makers today often require gender analyses when planning projects on climate change, disaster risk reduction, and food and water insecurity. SEI staff are increasingly providing research-based services such as gender mainstreaming and capacity-building to enhance environment and development projects and programmes. SEI also supports evaluations and the development assessment tools to judge whether projects are delivering on gender needs and to identify gaps that still need to be addressed.

For example, SEI has worked closely with IUCN Mangroves for the Future to profile gender and social equity issues in coastal management in Asia. Along with the Korea Environment Institute, SEI has built gender mainstreaming capacity among academic

and government partners from Cambodia, Lao PDR and Vietnam. SEI is also seeking further engagement with the private sector on gender and social equity concerns and has begun initial discussions with the World FairTrade Organization Asia.

New research and future pathways

Gender and social equity focused research is a growing field at SEI. Below we identify new and emerging areas of inquiry that we expect to pursue in the coming years.

Gender professionals in environment and development: The gender experts who work in environment and development fields play a crucial role in the effort to make technical and scientific fields more inclusive and gender- and socially responsive. However, these professionals’ work continues to be constricted by the politics of knowledge, isolation, and subliminal patriarchal and patronizing attitudes. There are also tensions between technical planning approaches that emphasize simplicity and manageability, and the complex power dynamics on the ground. SEI research will examine the experiences of gender professionals and their everyday challenges. The goal is to identify lessons in theory and practice which could support more effective approaches to achieving gender and social equity outcomes in the environment and development spheres.

Climate finance and gender and social equity: The implementation of the Paris Agreement is expected to increase climate finance flows. While that finance is meant to benefit the widest possible set of stakeholders, existing power structures and social dynamics may prevent that. Thus, all climate finance instruments need to address gender and social equity issues. And even if efforts are made to enhance gender and social equity, programmes still need standard gender outcome indicators to report back from project-level to national-level fund administrators. As part of SEI’s work under the Climate Finance Initiative, SEI will study barriers in the financing process such as accreditation, reporting and selection that exclude



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A woman in Homalin, Myanmar, receives her drinking water delivery.

organizations and units within organizations with strong mandates for gender and social equity from accessing these funds.

Gender, disasters and displacement: Ongoing research in Asia explores how climate change and disasters are exacerbating vulnerabilities experienced by women and men, particularly relating to mobility and displacement. Displacement following disasters leaves communities vulnerable and forces them to face many unknown risks, including gender-based violence. Although gender-based violence is increasingly recognized as a major feature of many conflicts, its occurrence during disasters is not as well researched and remains unaddressed by policy and effective action. SEI will working to address these knowledge gaps through the use of GIS to track and monitor gender-based violence and efforts to prevent and respond to it after disasters. SEI will also be working towards gender-responsive resilience-building in post-disaster contexts.

Gender and transboundary large-scale development projects:

Local and global demand for food and, more recently, fuel has been driving the expansion of agricultural, extractive and energy industries, as well as “green” investments. Such investments have reshaped ecological systems and caused disposessions, displacement and changes in land, water and labour rights. All of these factors affect the overall livelihood security and well-being of rural women and men. SEI research aims to investigate the reconfiguration of gendered agricultural labour regimes and mobility; the negotiation of women’s water and land rights; dispossession and displacement; investment transaction transparency and safeguards compliance; and the overall role of power in shaping negotiation processes in large-scale land and water investments.

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