

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office/
British Embassy Kathmandu

Gender Equality & Social Inclusion Mainstreaming Research

Extended Executive Summary

18 April 2024



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1. Introduction

The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Mainstreaming Research Project is a one-year qualitative study commissioned by the United Kingdom (UK) Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and British Embassy Kathmandu (BEK). The research was undertaken by Adam Smith International (ASI) with the purpose of generating learning on how to include a meaningful focus on GESI within ‘mainstream’ development programmes.

This research was designed to answer three overarching research questions (RQs) with the intention that findings will practically inform future work and promote higher standards in GESI mainstreaming:

RQ1: What evidence is there of what works well in GESI mainstreaming (and what doesn't), from the international experience and literature?

RQ2: How do BEK-funded programmes mainstream GESI into their work?

RQ3: How does GESI mainstreaming in documents such as business cases and annual reviews translate into real delivery and observable outcomes?

This extended executive summary presents an overview of findings from the GESI Mainstreaming Research Project. Links to the full report and accompanying resources can be found in Section 9.

2. GESI Mainstreaming Framework

The research team developed a framework of GESI mainstreaming (Figure 1) which would allow space for different GESI mainstreaming approaches to be explored, whilst also enabling a degree of consistency in the way data was collected, analysed, and presented. It was evident from the global literature that an intersectional lens needed to be placed at the centre of the framework. A relatively consistent focus was also placed on what the research team defined as three ‘Essential Elements’ which were found to enable effective and meaningful GESI mainstreaming.

Three Essential Elements of Effective GESI Mainstreaming

- **Essential Element 1:** A systematic approach through strong **leadership and accountability** to motivate and enable a focus on GESI within programmes.
- **Essential Element 2:** GESI being integral to programme teams through the development of **GESI capacity and an inclusive team culture**.
- **Essential Element 3:** An outcomes focus, with an emphasis on GESI **results, ongoing learning, and adaptation** within programmes.

Although distinct, these ‘Essential Elements’ were presented in the literature as being highly interconnected and required in combination. There was no suggestion in the literature that a sole focus on any

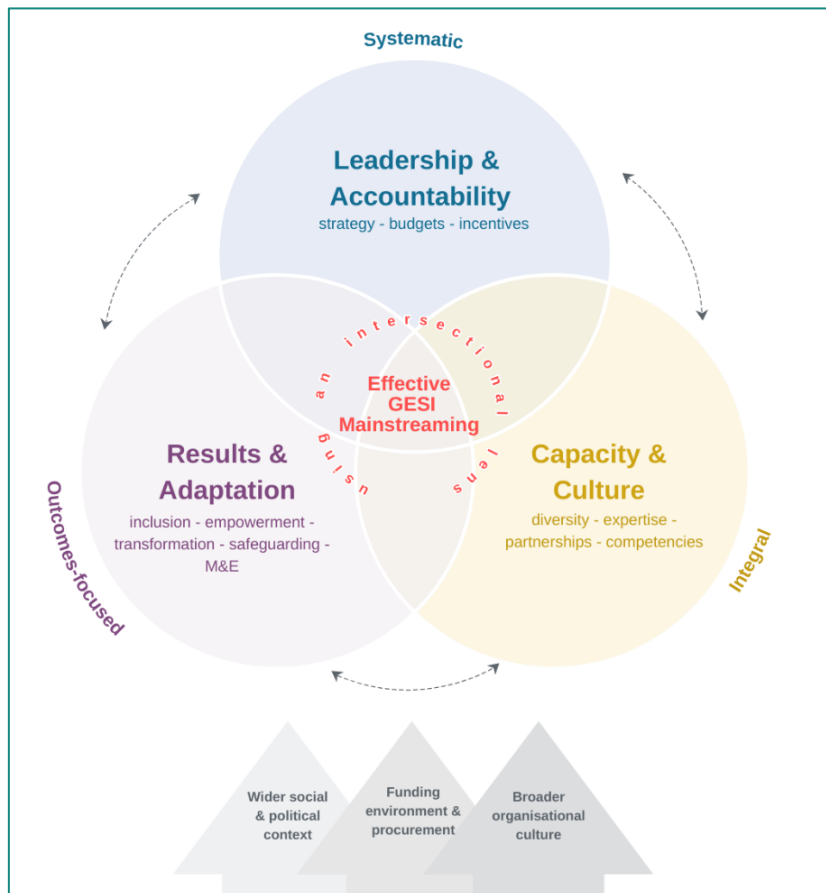


Figure 1 GESI Mainstreaming Framework

of one of these areas was sufficient in itself, but rather that all three areas needed attention as part of an overall approach to GESI mainstreaming.

Twelve Common Approaches to GESI Mainstreaming

Under the three Essential Elements, sources consistently underlined the value of certain approaches to GESI mainstreaming. These were either confidently promoted, for example through guidance, or were those which had been identified as valuable through reviews and evaluations. The approaches identified across the literature were clustered into a set of 12 'Common Approaches' to GESI mainstreaming. These were then mapped to the three Essential Elements in the GESI mainstreaming framework, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1 Essential Elements & Common Approaches to GESI Mainstreaming

Essential Elements	Common Approaches to GESI Mainstreaming
Leadership and accountability to motivate and enable a focus on GESI within programmes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Establishing programme GESI strategies. 2. Budgeting for GESI mainstreaming within programmes. 3. Motivating programme teams to work on GESI.
GESI capacity within programmes and an inclusive team culture.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Diversifying programme teams. 5. Including GESI experts within programmes. 6. Establishing GESI-focused partnerships within programmes. 7. Training teams on GESI.
A focus on GESI results, ongoing learning and adaptation within programmes.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. Using intersectional GESI analysis within programmes. 9. Strengthening the participation and reach of programmes. 10. Incorporating GESI-focused interventions within programmes. 11. Addressing additional risks associated with work on GESI. 12. Tracking progress on GESI by programmes.

Wider Contextual Factors

The wider social and political context, funding environment and procurement and broader organisational culture were also emphasised in the literature as playing an important enabling or constraining role. These were therefore reflected in the framework.

Box 1: A note on terminology: A plethora of overlapping terms has been used in the development sector to describe GESI mainstreaming practice, including references to programmes being 'gender sensitive', 'using a GESI lens', being 'inclusive' and so on. A clear message conveyed by the literature was that the array of gender and GESI-related terminology and jargon used has been confusing and off-putting in terms of encouraging people to engage. With this in mind, effort has been made in this extended summary (and in other outputs from the research) to use clear and accessible language when describing approaches to GESI mainstreaming and to be as precise as possible, avoiding vague terms.

3. Research Methodology

The research methodology was divided into three interlinked stages:

Stage 1: Global literature synthesis. The research began with a synthesis of global literature on GESI mainstreaming. The focus here was on answering RQ1 through the review of a sample of 36 documents.

Stage 2: BEK portfolio review. Following the Stage 1 Global Literature Synthesis, the research moved on to a review of the BEK portfolio of programmes. The focus here was on seeking to answer RQ2 through interviews and review of a selection of documents for a sample of 15 programmes in the BEK portfolio.

Stage 3: Deep-dive case studies. Following the Stage 2 BEK Portfolio Review, the research team took a closer look at a sub-set of four BEK programmes using semi-structured interviews to answer RQ3.

4. Use of GESI mainstreaming approaches within the BEK portfolio

The GESI Mainstreaming Framework was used to review efforts across the BEK portfolio. Figure 2 captures the use of the 12 Common Approaches across the sample of 15 BEK programmes. The Essential Elements are noted in the centre of the figure and, as in the framework, the numbered Common Approaches are clustered around each of these. The other numbers indicate the number of BEK-funded programmes which were found to have used each Common Approach. The numbers in white in the darker shaded areas represent programmes which had made considerable effort to use the approach. The numbers in black within the lighter shaded areas represent programmes which had used the approach but only to a limited extent.

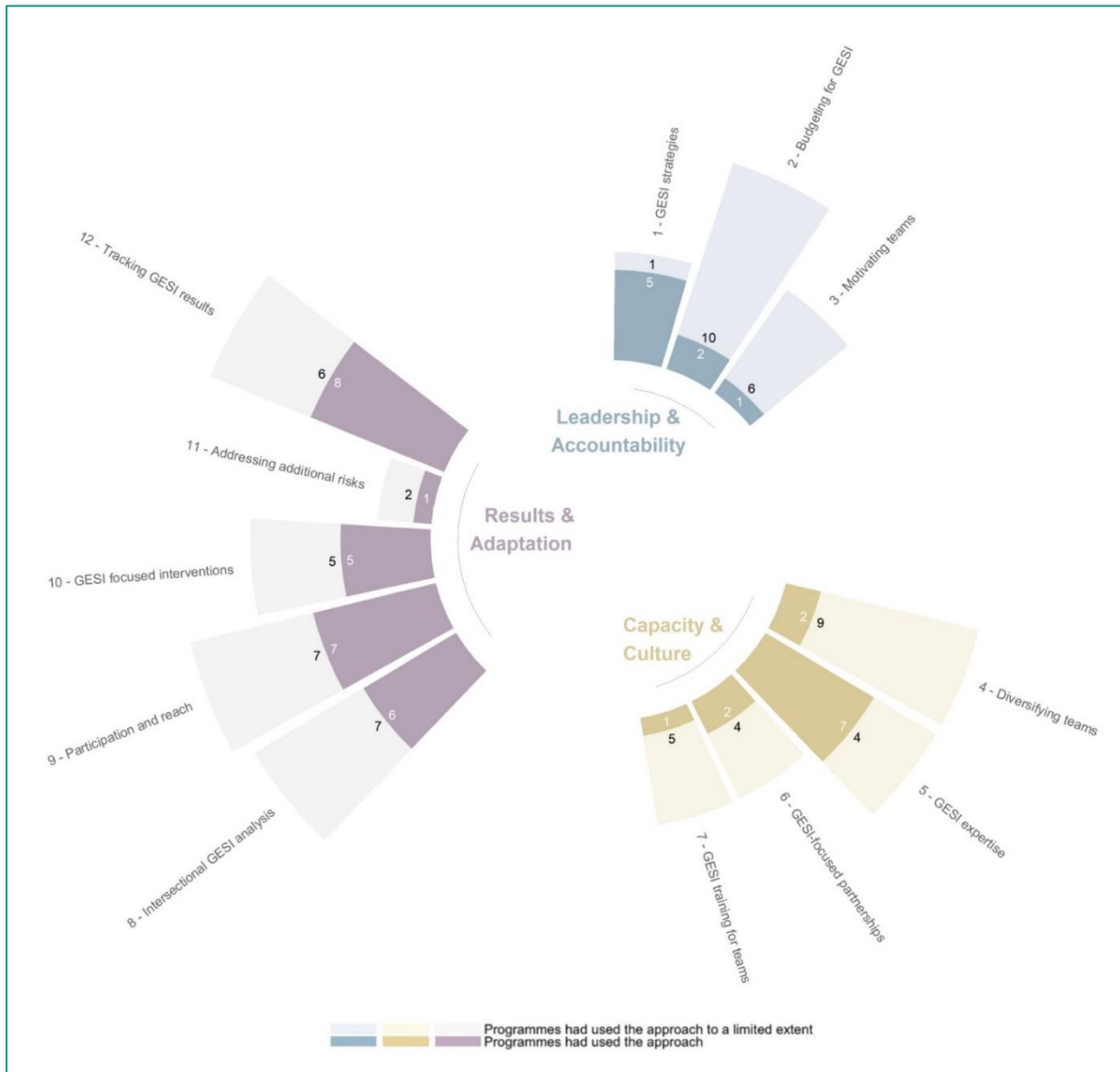


Figure 2 GESI Mainstreaming in BEK Programming

As shown in Figure 2, GESI mainstreaming approaches across all three Essential Elements had been used within the BEK portfolio. However, focusing in on the programmes which had made clear and concerted efforts to use the Common Approaches highlights a considerable degree of variability across the portfolio. This suggests there is no standard way in which BEK programmes have approached GESI mainstreaming. Rather, programmes have been using a variety of approaches to varying degrees and some have been doing far more than others.

Concerted efforts by programmes to use Common Approaches were largely concentrated around Essential Elements 2 (capacity & culture) and 3 (results & adaptation). Approximately half of the

portfolio had invested in GESI expertise within programme teams (Common Approach 5) and conducted GESI analysis to inform programme design (Common Approach 8). The same proportion had sought to track progress on GESI through disaggregated data and/or standalone GESI indicators (Common Approach 12). Approximately a third of programmes had developed GESI strategies and the same proportion had expanded the scope of their programmes to include targeted work on GESI (Common Approaches 1 and 10).

Some mainstreaming approaches had been used far less often across the portfolio. Far fewer programmes had intentionally established dedicated budget lines for GESI mainstreaming (Common Approach 2) and only one programme clearly articulated that leadership had proactively sought to motivate their team to work on GESI (Common Approach 3). Under Essential Element 2, only a small minority of programmes had intentionally recruited diverse teams (Common Approach 4), had partnered with organisations with GESI expertise (Common Approach 6), or had clearly invested in developing the knowledge, competencies, and skills of teams to work on GESI (Common Approach 7). Very few programmes had documented or clearly articulated efforts to consider and address backlash and other risks related to GESI mainstreaming (Common Approach 11). This was in contrast to the global literature which placed an emphasis on the importance of each of these approaches.

More detailed finding for each of the Essential Elements are presented in the sections below. BEK programmes have only been identified when linked to specific examples of good or promising practice, which are captured in short boxes which punctuate the findings. It is important to note that the inclusion of these boxed examples should not be taken as an indication of positive GESI mainstreaming practice across an entire programme. Rather, the boxed examples helps pinpoint specific areas in which a BEK funded programme has used an approach to GESI mainstreaming which appears to be promising.

5. Findings on Essential Element 1: Leadership & Accountability

Programme leadership was consistently underlined in the global literature as a crucial aspect of effective GESI mainstreaming, with a lack of progress on GESI often blamed on insufficient or inconsistent leadership.

GESI Strategies

The need for programme leads to demonstrate and elevate commitments to GESI mainstreaming through programme GESI strategies was emphasised across the global literature. Across the BEK portfolio, there was considerable inconsistency in terms of whether programmes had developed GESI strategies. However, where GESI strategies had been used by BEK programmes, implementing teams often valued these, especially where they were linked to practical action plans. Programmes that had GESI strategies had used more GESI approaches than others.

Some programmes had developed GESI strategies after inception phases, reducing their influence on programme design. This chimed with global literature which underlined the value of providing clarity on GESI ambitions and approaches early on in a programme. BEK programme GESI strategies were strengthened when they were underpinned by conceptual clarity and an explicit focus on intersectionality. The status of some programme GESI strategies was unclear, with a lack of evidence that they had been used and implemented.

Budgeting for GESI

Sources within the global literature review stressed the fact that GESI mainstreaming requires a dedicated investment of resources with budget allocations for GESI needing to be explicit and visible. It was common for programmes across the BEK portfolio to have spent some resources on GESI mainstreaming. However, any budgeting for GESI within BEK programmes tended not to be explicitly stated.

A minority of BEK programmes had explicitly earmarked resources for GESI and/or had tracked how much they were spending on GESI mainstreaming efforts, with programme teams indicating that it was far easier to budget for and track spend on GESI-focused interventions than it was for GESI efforts which were woven into wider programmes interventions. BEK programme teams underlined the importance of donor expectations on GESI spend in terms of influencing budgeting and spending by implementing partners.

Box 2: Earmarking budget for GESI and tracking spend to strengthen accountability.

The Nepal Provincial and Local Governance Support Programme (PLGSP) had specific budget resources earmarked for GESI from the start of the programme in 2019, due to requirements of the Government of Norway. This ensured that GESI activities were funded and that spending on GESI activities were tracked and reported. PLGSP also did a retrospective calculation of spending on GESI focused activities. The earmarking of budget for GESI has meant that resources have been allocated for GESI throughout the programme cycle. Resources were invested in recruiting GESI expertise as permanent staff, as well as short-term inputs from GESI experts. In addition to this, there were dedicated resources for GESI programming that included input into GESI policy/strategy development, GESI trainings for government and elected officials, and conducting GESI audits.

Motivating Teams

The global literature emphasised the value of programme leads intentionally motivating their teams to address GESI through their work. Sources showed that a lack of accountability, especially of managers, was identified as a factor which had hindered progress on mainstreaming. The literature suggested a mix of staff performance assessment against GESI targets, sharing of learning on GESI mainstreaming approaches and outcomes, and integration of GESI in reporting templates and meetings to help encourage and drive GESI mainstreaming, although evidence confirming the impact of these was limited.

BEK programmes which had sought to motivate their teams to work on GESI had tended to concentrate on general messaging about the importance of GESI as a value, rather than programme leads taking intentional steps to motivate their teams to address GESI through some form of recognition or reward.

Whilst there was some mention of GESI mainstreaming being incorporated into programme team members' job descriptions, it was often unclear whether these had gone on to be included in any meaningful way in performance appraisals. In the absence of concrete accountability or reward mechanisms, it appeared that GESI mainstreaming efforts within the BEK portfolio tended to depend on individual interest and initiative.

Box 3: Using GESI indicators in performance appraisals to motivate work on GESI.

Senior leadership within the Nepal Climate Change Support Programme 2 (NCCSP2) explained that the motivation to mainstream GESI was also driven by a wider organisational commitment within the implementing partner. In Mott MacDonald's performance appraisal system, everyone has around 15 areas of goal setting, including equity, diversity and inclusion, health, safeguarding and wellbeing, and social outcomes. These goals are reviewed quarterly by line managers with more extensive annual appraisals which are linked to bonuses.

6. Findings on Essential Element 2: Capacity & Culture

Global literature highlighted that addressing GESI in the internal workings of programme teams made them better equipped to address GESI through programming.

Diverse Recruitment

Sources in the global literature not only underlined the importance of recruiting diverse teams but also the need to encourage diversity to be valued so that alternative perspectives were shared, listened to, and acted upon. Almost two thirds of BEK programmes were able to point to some degree of diversity within their teams, especially in terms of the recruitment of women. However, in most of these programmes it was unclear how proactively this had been prioritised or whether the diversity that had been achieved by implementing partners was incidental. Overall, there was a degree of inconsistency across the portfolio in terms of whether and to what extent diverse recruitment has been prioritised by programmes.

Diversity that had been achieved tended to be considered valuable by programme teams, who believed the lived experience of marginalisation had led to strengthened programming. Limited diversity in many parts of government meant that including women and people from marginalised groups in programme

and technical assistance (TA) teams was an immediate way of bringing diverse voices and perspectives into meetings and events.

For BEK programmes that had taken a more proactive approach to promoting diversity, challenges in recruiting candidates from marginalised backgrounds had prompted them to re-evaluate recruitment criteria and seek to widen applicant pools. Programmes highlighted challenges in recruiting candidates from marginalised groups who had necessary expertise for roles with programmes. For several programmes, a lack of candidates from diverse backgrounds led to what they perceived as a tension between promoting diversity and merit-based recruitment.

In several cases, an emphasis on diverse recruitment within programme teams had been driven by BEK as well as wider organisational commitments of implementing partners. It was helpful to have a mutual understanding that diverse recruitment takes time and would sometimes mean that implementing partners needed to take a chance on candidates who were not always the most obvious choice.

Box 4: Using diverse recruitment to mainstream GESI in programme delivery.

In the second phase of the BEK-funded Data for Development (D4D) programme, the implementing team established a clear ambition to strengthen team diversity, especially in terms of gender, caste, and class. With low numbers of women and people from marginalised communities working in the data and technology sectors, they felt it was particularly important for the programme to have a diverse team. In order to achieve increased diversity, the team focused on strengthening the recruitment process. This included categorising candidates and prioritising those from excluded groups. Only when women or those from Dalit or Madhesh communities were not available did they then look to recruit from other groups. The team explained that an important aspect of this approach was that where they identified a female candidate from a marginalised group who had less experience than others, they had still recruited them but on a short-term contract and provided them with support until they could move them over to a more permanent role. As a result of these efforts, D4D colleagues believe they have managed to strengthen diversity within their relatively small programme team and among field coordinators. They have also brought the same focus on diversity when seeking to identify consultants.

GESI Expertise

The global literature placed a consistent emphasis on the need to invest in some form of GESI expertise so that teams had access to the technical capacity needed to implement GESI mainstreaming. This was linked to evidence that GESI experts had strengthened mainstreaming efforts within programmes, and that performance was weaker when they were not in place. Several sources underlined the value of GESI expertise being embedded in teams, being sector and context specific and being in place at the very start of programmes, before they are designed.

In line with this, the use of GESI experts was relatively common across the BEK portfolio, with most programmes having brought at least some GESI expertise into their teams, either through permanent roles or for discrete inputs. A minority of programmes appeared to have had no input from GESI experts at all. Chiming with the global literature, these programmes appeared to have done far less to mainstream GESI overall. In contrast, programmes which had embedded full time GESI experts in their programme teams often described the value this had added to programmes and the pivotal role they played in advocating for and helping to deliver mainstreaming approaches.

Where BEK programmes had relied on inputs from GESI experts outside programme teams, this often resulted in them being too far removed from the design and delivery details to meaningfully input and shape GESI mainstreaming. BEK programmes which had meaningfully invested in GESI expertise had tended to bring them into their core teams in full time dedicated roles with a clear set of responsibilities.

Whilst the global literature highlighted the role which GESI focal persons can play within GESI mainstreaming, there appears to be some confusion within the BEK portfolio where GESI focal persons who had little or no previous GESI experience were considered interchangeable with GESI experts.

Programmes employing multiple GESI specialists within their wider teams highlighted the benefit of this in enabling a more nuanced understanding of contextual complexities and more tailored approaches to GESI mainstreaming. These experts also appeared to be able to work collectively as a team, rather than being a lone voice on GESI within the programme, something which was highlighted as valuable in the

global literature. Having a GESI ‘team’ within BEK programmes was especially valued given a lack of cross-programme networking or collaboration among GESI experts.

The difficulty of recruiting GESI experts with combined expertise in gender inequality *and* social exclusion was raised as a challenge among BEK programmes, potentially impacting the scope of GESI approaches across programmes and resulting in limited use of an intersectional lens. A lack of professional development support for GESI experts within BEK programmes appears to be underpinned by an unrealistic expectation that GESI experts would automatically come equipped to work across every aspect of a programme without the need for any upskilling.

Box 5: Equipping programme teams with GESI expertise.

At the start of programme implementation, the Team Leader for BEK’s Sudridh-Nepal Urban Resilience Programme (NURP), who herself has GESI expertise, brought in a Nepali GESI expert as the programme’s Lead GESI Adviser. Bringing her in at this point meant she was able to influence fundamental ways of working within the team and shape programme interventions. The GESI Lead recruited GESI specialists who were based in the three municipalities in which the programme was working. These specialists developed a more nuanced contextual understanding of how GESI mainstreaming was working at a local level, something which would not have been possible with just one GESI expert based in Kathmandu. The specialists fed back insights on programme delivery to the GESI Lead so she could tailor GESI mainstreaming approaches to each context. This was helpful in moving away from a blanket approach to true GESI mainstreaming.

GESI-focused Partnerships

Several sources within the global literature highlight the value of working with local partners in helping to bring contextually relevant knowledge on GESI into programmes and to enable access to marginalised communities. This was also framed within the literature as enabling programmes to contribute to longer term processes of change in support of GESI.

Approximately a third of the BEK portfolio demonstrated some use of partnerships to enhance GESI capacity within programmes but only two had actively engaged in strong collaborations with GESI-focused organisations. These collaborations appeared to have added value, including enabling interventions to strengthen collective voice.

More commonly, BEK programmes had engaged with civil society organisations, including those with GESI expertise, as part of consultations. Others had also supported various levels of government to engage with civil society organisations and seek their inputs, for example during policy or strategy development.

Several GESI experts within BEK programme teams thought that partnering with GESI-focused organisations would have been beneficial. They also felt that such partnerships could have helped to strengthen the understanding and capacity of programme team members to work on GESI. However, it appears that GESI experts rarely had the authority, budget, or flexibility within BEK programmes to bring in local or international partners focused on GESI.

Box 6: Partnering with women’s rights organisations and survivor-led organisations.

The Hamro Samman programme has been intentional and strategic about selecting partners, including women’s rights organisations and survivor-led organisations, who brought a solid understanding of issues related to trafficking. A learning brief for the programme identified that this had contributed to the integration of GESI at the institutional level within the programme. The value of having a number of national and local organisations who could engage with federal, provincial, and local governments was underlined here. So too was the fact that the organisations did not work broadly on GESI but were instead focused on specific issues, and crucially brought in the voices of people with a lived experience who could speak about issues first hand.

Team Training

Within the global literature a lack of knowledge and skills among teams was identified as a considerable barrier to progress on GESI mainstreaming. Training was consistently highlighted as a valuable part of a wider approach to competency development. Several sources pointed to the importance of team members

being personally convinced of the need and value of GESI mainstreaming in order to achieve anything other than token gestures within programmes.

Several BEK programmes had made at least some investments to strengthen the knowledge, competencies and skills of their teams to mainstream GESI, but only two had done so to a considerable extent. Others had not prioritised GESI training for their teams. Several implementing partners had delivered their own organisational training on GESI which was generic rather than tailored to specific programmes. This meant that GESI trainings were not necessarily timed to fit the programme timeframe and were delivered to different team members at different times, instead of at the beginning of the programme. This had meant that programme delivery started without team members having been trained on GESI mainstreaming.

A reliance on company-wide GESI trainings contrasted with the global literature which placed an emphasis on moving beyond using training to provide general information on GESI. In some cases, 'GESI training' or orientations delivered by BEK implementing partners simply communicated GESI as a value and something which team members should be aware of. With few exceptions, trainings lacked a focus on fostering a sense of commitment to GESI mainstreaming and crucially building the skills needed to deliver it. Programmes appeared to lack clarity about whether BEK programmes could use budgets to train programme teams. This was linked to the notion that implementing partners should come equipped with GESI knowledge and mainstreaming skills and should not need to be trained using BEK resources.

Box 7: Building GESI capacity within programme teams.

Within NURP, a focus on GESI competency development started long before training was delivered and was rooted in the recruitment process. The requirement to attend GESI training was included in every job description within the programme team. Early on, the programme's GESI Lead identified that there was a limit to what GESI training could achieve if participants were resistant to absorbing the information they were being given and opposed to the idea of incorporating GESI into their work. As a result, the GESI Lead and Team Leader were involved in the recruitment interviews for all other team members. Rather than ensuring every team member they recruited had knowledge or experience on GESI, during interviews they checked whether candidates had an openness to learning more about GESI and prioritised them in the final selection. This included those who were applying for specialist roles such as architects and engineers. The interview process also provided an early opportunity to make an initial assessment of candidates' knowledge and competencies in relation to GESI so they knew how much support they would need if they took on the role.

7. Findings on Essential Element 3: Results & Adaptation

Intersectional GESI Analysis

Global sources highlighted the potential for operationally focused GESI analyses to strengthen GESI mainstreaming within programmes, in particular by enabling barriers for marginalised groups to be identified and understood.

In line with this, most programmes within the BEK portfolio had conducted some form of GESI analysis at some stage, with varying degrees of depth and detail. It was especially commonplace for some form of GESI analysis to have been included in the business cases for BEK programmes. These early analyses were often fairly broad-brush and whilst in some cases they had helped to establish that GESI was within the scope of a programme, they were often not fine grained enough to inform specific activities or interventions.

Limited and inconsistent use of intersectional analysis by BEK programmes had reduced opportunities to consider multiple and overlapping forms of discrimination and exclusion. In some cases, BEK programmes described their GESI analyses as having been intersectional, although it was clear that perspectives varied about what using an 'intersectional lens' really meant.

Despite an emphasis in the global literature on the need to ensure GESI analysis is used, the connection between GESI analysis and its influence on BEK programme design was not always explicit. Where GESI analysis had been used to inform the design of BEK programmes, it was common for this to have led to GESI-focused interventions or minimal efforts to tweak mainstream interventions, rather than fundamentally reshaping them in order to benefit marginalised groups. In line with the global literature, programmes tended to find GESI analysis most valuable when it was conducted on an ongoing basis for specific activities and interventions and was built into programme processes, rather than in the form of one broad GESI analysis at the start. Notably, the BEK funded programmes which did this were those who had GESI expertise within their teams or access to ongoing support from a GESI expert.

In contrast, some programmes within the BEK portfolio viewed GESI analysis as a one-off activity. Here, the classic programme cycle which positions GESI analysis as an initial activity may have been unhelpful. Whilst some BEK programmes had gone on to do more specific GESI analyses to inform their targeting and planning, in others a lack of analysis for specific interventions or components meant important GESI issues had been overlooked. This had led to some interventions being far more simplistic than it is common to see in standalone GESI projects and programmes.

Participation and Reach

Global literature emphasised the importance of programmes addressing the challenges and barriers marginalised groups face in accessing and benefiting from programme interventions and resources. In line with this, it was common for BEK programmes to have made some effort to address barriers faced by particular groups. In many cases, these efforts had a strong emphasis on addressing the practical needs of women to enable their participation under existing government provisions. This ranged from simple messaging by members of BEK programme teams to raise awareness that government provisions existed and were important to more proactive steps to encourage and enable women's participation – and in some cases participation by historically marginalised groups.

In a minority of BEK programmes, interviewees also referred to adjustments made to enable participation of people with disabilities. These tended to focus on basic interventions to address physical barriers rather than more complex work to address social barriers to meaningful participation. In some programmes, efforts to address barriers to participation appeared to be reactive rather than anticipated, with some only identified quite far into programme implementation.

Some programmes within the BEK portfolio had created spaces for certain groups to participate in, for example women, but without explicit consideration of intersectionality. Some programme teams reflected that adopting an intersectional lens would have added considerable value. Examples within the BEK portfolio suggested that despite the inclusion of women and some marginalised groups in programme activities, they faced ongoing barriers to their meaningful participation. There was often a lack of evidence of approaches being used to go beyond ensuring women and people from marginalised groups were 'at the table' in order to work towards meaningful participation and influence.

Most notably, some BEK programmes had adopted very broad definitions of terms such as 'vulnerability' and 'disadvantage' rather than focusing specifically on particular marginalised groups. These were preferred by some implementing teams as they allowed space for looser definitions and less specific categories of people they were attempting to target. Some interviewees from BEK programmes therefore expressed some relief when BEK was comfortable with broader definitions as it reduced the pressure to target harder to reach groups and to engage with more thorny issues around power and historic marginalisation.

GESI-focused Interventions

Global literature underlined the importance of efforts to expand the scope of mainstream development programmes to maximise opportunities to contribute to empowerment and wider transformative change. These were often described as GESI-focused interventions and workstreams and additional components of work within mainstream programmes.

Most BEK programmes reviewed had included some form of GESI-focused activities or interventions, most commonly with a focus on women. BEK programmes that stood out here tended to have also invested in GESI expertise and had conducted analysis to better understand GESI issues. However, it was not always evident that BEK programmes had designed GESI-focused interventions based on GESI analysis, especially where programmes had responded to opportunities presented in the wider context.

A number of BEK programmes had also included GESI-focused efforts through their work with government, most commonly at provincial and municipal levels. This included TA to support the development and approval of standalone GESI policies. All BEK programmes which had invested in supporting GESI policies had also provided some form of GESI training or orientation to federal, provincial, and municipal officials and/or elected representatives. However, whilst programmes were able to provide data on the numbers of people trained, they tended to provide only anecdotal evidence of any shifts in terms of knowledge or decision-making as a result. Overall, it was unclear whether the delivery of GESI trainings and work to establish government GESI policies represented a first step in a longer-term process of influencing change. There also appeared to be a lack of coordination among BEK programmes working with governments to develop GESI policies and deliver GESI trainings. Contrary to the global literature, a focus on norm change, shifting mindsets beyond government and efforts to strengthen collective voice were uncommon within the BEK portfolio.

In contrast to the global literature, it was often unclear whether/how GESI-focused interventions connected with other programme interventions and outcomes. There was a sense among some implementing partners that it was more straightforward to include discrete GESI interventions within programmes compared to the complexity of weaving them into broader programme interventions and processes.

Box 8: Targeted programming to expand access for health services.

The Nepal Health Sector Support Programme (NHSSP) used the approach of targeted programming to reach particular groups. Elements of the programme were designed to support the provision of health services to specific women, children, underserved and at-risk populations, through a combination of mainstreaming them into basic health services and well as targeted interventions. The programme supported policy work, awareness raising among service providers and users, and capacity development of service providers. These were primarily done through the lenses of universal healthcare access and Leave No One Behind.

Additional Risks

The global literature highlighted the importance of programme leads seeking to understand and address potential risks associated with GESI mainstreaming, especially where efforts seek to challenge the status quo and challenge current power dynamics and resource distribution. It is important to emphasise that this research did not look at safeguarding practice within BEK programmes, but instead looked more specifically at whether BEK programmes had sought to identify and address risks which might stem from – or be exacerbated by – GESI mainstreaming approaches being used.

Whilst it is possible that a review of safeguarding approaches used by BEK programmes would reveal that potential additional risks related to GESI mainstreaming have been addressed, few implementing partner teams could describe potential unintended repercussions of their work on GESI. For example, little was noted in terms of potential intra-household tensions as a result of efforts to strengthen women's economic empowerment, or to possible community backlash triggered by efforts to challenge the status quo and target resources at certain groups.

Box 9: Addressing additional risks in programme delivery.

Within the BEK funded Skills for Employment Programme (SEP), GESI mainstreaming and safeguarding against SEAH tended to be placed together within programme documents, framed as two interlinked aspects of dismantling social barriers. Within the programme, safeguarding against SEAH was viewed as a prerequisite for marginalised and excluded groups' employment in projects, based on the idea that working environments needing to be made safer for women and people with disabilities before they were encouraged to enter them. This has included factories and other employers needing to have sexual harassment policies in place and to have thought through practical measures such as separate accommodation, bathrooms, and changing facilities for women workers. In some cases, this had required a significant shift in culture and operating practice within companies, something which had taken longer than the programme team had initially anticipated. These delays were something which the team judged were necessary and represented better value for money than taking the risk that not all private sector partners had adopted such safeguarding measures.

Tracking and Reporting

Addressing GESI through programme M&E was consistently recognised in the global literature as a vital aspect of mainstreaming, including the use of disaggregated indicators to identify who was accessing and benefiting from programmes. There was also an emphasis on the value of looking beyond disaggregation of programme indicators to develop GESI-specific outcomes and indicators.

Tracking of results through disaggregated data was the most commonly used approach to GESI mainstreaming within the BEK portfolio, even where few other GESI mainstreaming approaches had been used by programmes. However, there was considerable variation in terms of levels and types of disaggregation being conducted, not only across the BEK portfolio but even within individual programmes. Whilst several BEK programmes had disaggregated at both outcome and output level, most commonly disaggregation was focused on outputs and in some cases, only at activity level. In addition, within some logframes certain indicators had been disaggregated and others had not, without a clear logic or explicit rationale. Sex disaggregation was the most common form of disaggregation, although where BEK programmes had disaggregated by other social groups, it was not always clear how and why these had been selected. There was also a noticeable tendency among some BEK programmes to refer to broad categories of people when disaggregating, rather than specific groups.

Disaggregated data had most commonly enabled BEK programmes to capture information about programme reach, although it was common for programmes to present disaggregated data as distinct, separate groups with a lack of attention to intersectionality. Some programme teams explained that the more complex disaggregation of programme data which looked at groups within groups would have better revealed who was benefiting from development programming – and who was not.

Despite the emphasis in the global literature on the importance of disaggregated data being used, it was often unclear within the BEK portfolio why certain forms of disaggregated data were being collected and whether they were being analysed and used with a clear purpose. In some cases, programme teams and government systems had collected sizable volumes of disaggregated data which were ever expanding but with little evidence that the datasets were being analysed and used to inform learning and decision making.

Several BEK programmes were, at least to some extent, using a mix of both disaggregation and GESI-focused indicators to track progress. Some programmes which had used GESI-focused indicators felt they not only gave status to GESI but had enabled regular discussion about GESI mainstreaming. GESI indicators appeared to have been most useful when they were designed to capture whether GESI results were being achieved, rather than mainstreaming efforts had simply been made. Overall, missed opportunities were evident in terms of using GESI-focused results indicators to capture the potential true value of BEK programme interventions.

Box 10: Adding a GESI-focused output to the logframe.

D4D sits under the wider Evidence for Development (E4D) programme. The BEK SRO for E4D identified a gap in terms of GESI in the E4D logframe and in discussion with implementing partners, a GESI-focused output was added to the phase 2 logframe. This included a dedicated reporting line for output 5 for each of the programmes which came under E4D, including D4D. From BEK's perspective, the inclusion of this GESI-focused output helpfully enabled all GESI-related efforts within E4D to be collated in one place. It also created space for regular discussions between BEK and E4D programme teams on how GESI was being addressed.

8. Conclusions

The findings of this research underline the relevance of the GESI mainstreaming framework, not only at a conceptual level, but as a practical tool to define the scope of GESI mainstreaming and the range of approaches it encompasses. All 12 of the Common Approaches included in the GESI Mainstreaming Framework have been used somewhere within the BEK portfolio. These yield plenty of examples of promising practice where specific efforts can be showcased and used to inspire others. However, what is also evident is a considerable degree of inconsistency across the portfolio, both in terms of whether approaches have been used at all by a programme – and in terms of how they have been used.

The nature of GESI mainstreaming means it cannot be a uniform process and some variation should always be expected. Nevertheless, the research has highlighted several areas for strengthening GESI mainstreaming efforts and results within BEK programmes. Rather than being based on conscious decisions about the mainstreaming approaches which would best suit individual programmes, this inconsistency appears to be underpinned by a lack of clarity about what GESI mainstreaming means and looks like in BEK programmes and what BEK's expectations and ambitions are in this regard. In the absence of this clarity, programmes have taken GESI mainstreaming in different directions: some taking a more meaningful and considered approach, others in a way which is far more superficial and potentially token.

Although the term 'intersectionality' frequently appeared in BEK programme documents, a truly intersectional approach has not consistently been used. Doing so requires programmes to engage with the complex, challenging and messy realities of how various forms of discrimination and marginalisation overlap, intertwine and compound one another. The use of an intersectional lens in programming also necessitates greater use of ongoing analysis to really understand existing power dynamics and patterns of disadvantage to inform programme interventions.

Deeply entrenched power dynamics – either explicit or implicit – act to maintain discrimination and inequality. Challenging these power dynamics and disrupting the status quo tends to be accompanied by some degree of pushback – or in some cases – backlash. Yet, few programmes within the BEK portfolio could articulate the risks which might accompany their mainstreaming efforts or describe ways they had sought to mitigate them through programme design and delivery.

As with any technical aspect of programming, GESI mainstreaming requires GESI expertise. The importance of this has come through strongly in the research, not only in the global literature but in the findings from the BEK portfolio. The research has also underlined that a GESI expert is not the same as a GESI Focal Person who has been allocated particular responsibility for work on GESI. The research findings also underline the importance of diverse recruitment, bringing in perspectives which people cannot be trained to have but which are based on a lived experience of marginalisation. The research suggests this is an asset to programme teams which is worth investing in and adjusting timeframes to ensure.

The global literature also emphasised the importance of implementing partners establishing partnerships with GESI focused organisations: those who already understand the complexity of issues, are familiar with interventions and the risks associated with them and who have access to marginalised communities. Across the BEK portfolio, GESI mainstreaming efforts appear to have been concentrated on formal policy change and attempts to shift mindsets within government, and less on shifting social norms to support equality and inclusion, on more comprehensive approaches to empowerment, or on strengthening collective voice among marginalised groups. Partnerships with GESI-focused organisations may have helped BEK programmes widen their GESI mainstreaming efforts into these areas.

The global literature cautions against organisations being too focused on GESI mainstreaming as a process rather than a means to an end. The research highlights a risk of this within the BEK portfolio, with a tendency to limit GESI-focused indicators to output level. If linked to clear GESI ambitions set by BEK for its programme portfolio, a results focus to GESI mainstreaming could helpfully fix attention not just on what has been done in terms of mainstreaming but what has actually been achieved in terms of equality and inclusion.

9. Lessons

The GESI Mainstreaming Framework provides a practical tool to define the scope of GESI mainstreaming within development programming. The following lessons have emerged from the research which are of broader relevance to the donor community in Nepal and beyond. They are structured around the 12 Common Approaches in the GESI Mainstreaming Framework. In addition, a practical checklist for GESI mainstreaming has been developed, which builds on the research findings (see below).

1. **Programmes can helpfully demonstrate and elevate commitments to GESI mainstreaming through the use of programme GESI strategies, especially where they were linked to practical action plans.** It is important that these are developed with an intersectional lens, providing conceptual clarity about what the programme means by GESI mainstreaming and what its ambitions are in this regard. It is also important that GESI strategies are timed in order to meaningfully influence programme design, developed initially during the inception phase and then revisited throughout the life of a programme.
2. **GESI mainstreaming requires a dedicated investment of resources, with budget allocations for GESI needing to be explicit and visible.** Donors need to set clear expectations on GESI-related budgeting by implementing partners, with actual spending being tracked throughout programme implementation. This is usually easier with GESI-focused interventions within programmes, rather than efforts to weave GESI into programme interventions. Calculations need to be explicit to ensure that spending on GESI has not been overstated.
3. **It is important for programme leadership to intentionally motivate their teams to address GESI through their work.** This needs to go beyond general messaging about the importance of GESI as a value, and instead focus on programme leads taking intentional steps to motivate their teams to address GESI through their work. Internal accountability mechanisms can be used to support GESI mainstreaming but it is important that efforts such as including GESI responsibilities in job descriptions are carried through to performance appraisals.
4. **Recruiting diverse programme teams and encouraging diversity to be valued so that alternative perspectives are shared, listened to and acted upon is an important aspect of GESI mainstreaming.** Diversity can help to bring a lived experience of marginalisation into implementing teams and can help strengthen programming. Given limited diversity among government officials, ensuring diversity in programme teams can be an immediate way of bringing diverse voices and perspectives into meetings and events. It is important that donors understand that diverse recruitment can take time and sometimes means taking a chance on candidates who were not always the most obvious choice.
5. **GESI mainstreaming requires GESI expertise. This is most effective when GESI experts are embedded in full time roles which give them status within programme teams.** Programmes may need to employ multiple GESI experts to ensure that their GESI capacity matches the scale and scope of the overall programme. It is unrealistic to expect that GESI experts will automatically be equipped to work across every aspect of a programme without the need for any upskilling. GESI experts may therefore need some professional development support, accessed through programme budgets as an essential part of ongoing learning and development, so they can work effectively across programmes.
6. **Partnerships with GESI-focused organisations can enhance GESI capacity within programmes and add value to the design and delivery of interventions.** As well as encouraging and enabling GESI-focused organisations to participate in consultations, it can be helpful for implementing partners to establish partnerships with organisations such as women's rights organisations and organisations led by and for people with disabilities, as well as those who represent historically marginalised and other excluded groups. This can help programmes have the capacity and expertise to integrate GESI into programme interventions as well as developing GESI-focused interventions. Emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring these partnerships are not tokenistic, exploitative, or purely transactional, but rather based on mutual respect and a two-way exchange of knowledge.
7. **As well as a commitment to GESI, it is important that programme teams are equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to play a role in GESI mainstreaming.** Organisation-wide GESI training provided by implementing partners is likely to be insufficient and too generic to equip teams with the skills they need. GESI trainings need to be tailored to the specific programmes which teams

are working on. Donors can provide helpful reassurance and clarity to implementing partners about the use of programme budgets to deliver such programme-specific training. GESI trainings for programme teams can be effectively led by programme GESI leads. Inputs from external organisations which specialise in GESI and/or which represent or work with particular marginalised groups could also add value.

8. **Intersectional and operationally focused GESI analyses can strengthen GESI mainstreaming within programmes by enabling barriers to be identified and understood.** This will be most valuable when it is conducted on an ongoing basis and is built into programme processes, rather than in the form of one broad GESI analysis at the start of a programme. GESI analysis for specific interventions can help ensure their design reflects the complexity of inequality and exclusion and the barriers which need to be addressed.
9. **Programmes need to address the challenges and barriers marginalised groups face in accessing and benefiting from programme interventions and resources.** Clearly identified and defined categories of people can help reach those at risk of being left behind and who experience multiple forms of discrimination. In contrast, broad and loosely defined terms may mean programmes avoid engaging with thorny issues related to unequal power relations and historic marginalisation, leaving barriers unaddressed.
10. **Mainstream development programmes should identify opportunities to include GESI-focused activities or interventions, drawing on GESI expertise, analysis and GESI-focused partnerships to help them do so.** It is important that these aim to work towards results, for example GESI policy implementation, shifts in mindsets and norms to support GESI, empowerment of women from marginalised communities and collective voice and influence.
11. **It is important that programmes seek to understand and address potential risks associated with GESI mainstreaming, especially where efforts seek to challenge current power dynamics and resource distribution.** This includes being alert to potential unintended consequences of GESI mainstreaming, including intra-household tensions and community backlash. An assessment of potential risks should be built into ongoing GESI analysis which takes into account both contextual and programmatic risk factors. GESI-related risks and mitigation measures should then be reflected in programme risk registers and reviewed on an ongoing basis.
12. **Addressing GESI through programme M&E is a vital aspect of mainstreaming, including the use of both disaggregated and GESI-specific indicators.** Disaggregation should enable intersectional analysis of how multiple, intersecting identities determine who is – and is not – benefitting. Disaggregation needs to have a clearly stated purpose with a plan for analysis which will enable it to be used for accountability and to inform learning and decision making. GESI-focused indicators are helpful in terms of tracking progress, not only in terms of mainstreaming efforts but at outcome level with a focus on ultimately capturing GESI results.

10. Additional Information & Resources

The following research resources can be found at the [project page](#):

- Final Report
- Stage 1 Report: Global Literature Synthesis
- Recorded presentation on research findings and application in development programming



Additionally, a GESI Mainstreaming Checklist is included below.






GESI Mainstreaming Checklist






This checklist is for use by SROs, PROs, and implementing partners to assess gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) mainstreaming within development assistance programming. The checklist is based on a global literature review and examination of real GESI practice within FCDO programming in Nepal. It was developed as part of a year-long research study commissioned the British Embassy Kathmandu (BEK) and carried out in 2023-24 by Adam Smith International. While the checklist was developed for the Nepal context, it is applicable to programmes globally.

Name of programme/component:

Checklist	Name	Role	Date
Filled by:			
Approved by:			
Next date for completion of checklist:			

Common Approach	Expected to have	Score	Notes, evidence and actions
Leadership & Accountability			
1. GESI strategy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does the programme have a GESI strategy – and for those developed from 2024 - is it structured around the 12 Common Approaches in the GESI mainstreaming framework? Does the GESI strategy draw links to the outcomes in the programme logframe? Have commitments in the GESI strategy been reflected in programme workplans and is the GESI strategy regularly reviewed and revised throughout the life of the programme? 	Yes Somewhat No	
2. Budgeting for GESI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the programme calculated how much they will spend on GESI over the life of the programme and in the year ahead? Do calculations include internal aspects of GESI mainstreaming (e.g., GESI training for the team) and external aspects (e.g., programme interventions)? Does the programme track spending on GESI and are calculations clear? 	Yes Somewhat No	

3. Team motivation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does programme leadership intentionally motivate implementing teams to address GESI? Is there accountability among leadership, management and implementors to support progress on GESI mainstreaming, for example through performance assessments against GESI targets? Do programmes have systems in place to recognise and reward achievements in relation to GESI within the programme? 	Yes Somewhat No	
Capacity & Culture			
4. Diverse recruitment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the implementing partner managed to recruit a diverse programme team? Have efforts been made by the implementing partner to establish a team culture where diversity is valued? Has programme leadership ensured diverse perspectives within the team are heard? 	Yes Somewhat No	
5. GESI expertise 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the implementing partner established an experienced GESI expert in a senior position within the team? Are there other GESI experts in the team and in field teams in numbers which are proportionate to the scale and scope of the programme? Have GESI experts within the team been provided with any capacity building support needed for them to work effectively, for example in relation to M&E or sectoral knowledge? 	Yes Somewhat No	
6. GESI-focused partners 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the implementing partner established partnerships with GESI-focused organisations who work with marginalised groups? Does the selection of GESI-focused partners match the types of marginalised groups the programme is trying to reach? Beyond GESI-focused activities and interventions, are these partners strengthening a focus on GESI across the programme? 	Yes Somewhat No	
7. Team training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has the programme team (including the field team and partners) received GESI training which is programme specific, and goes beyond organisation wide GESI training the implementing partner might provide as standard? Is the GESI training delivered by someone with the right expertise, and is it practically focused, going beyond basic messaging to teach the team the skills needed to mainstream GESI? Is GESI training regularly provided rather than just a one-off session, and does it form part of a wider capacity development plan to ensure the programme team is equipped to mainstream GESI? 	Yes Somewhat No	

Results & Adaptation			
8. GESI analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the programme conducted intersectional and operationally focused GESI analyses to identify barriers and issues faced by marginalised groups? • Is GESI analysis conducted on an ongoing basis to inform individual interventions, rather than as a one-off piece at the start? • Has GESI analysis been used to inform intervention design and delivery, including through ongoing adaptation? 	Yes Somewhat No	
9. Participation and reach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the programme made efforts to reach marginalised groups by addressing their basic needs and the barriers to their participation? • Is the programme using clearly defined categories of people it intends to reach, including those who experience multiple forms of discrimination? • Has GESI analysis informed strategies to encourage participation and programme reach? 	Yes Somewhat No	
10. GESI focused interventions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the programme incorporated interventions specifically focused on GESI, which are based on GESI analysis? • Are the ambitions of these interventions focused on actual change, for example policy implementation, empowerment, shifts in mindsets, or collective voice and influence? • Can the programme demonstrate a clear link between GESI-focused interventions and other programme interventions? 	Yes Somewhat No	
11. Additional risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has the programme sought to understand potential risks associated with GESI mainstreaming, including intra-household tensions and community backlash triggered by efforts to challenge the status quo or target resources at certain groups? • Have adequate efforts been made within the programme to mitigate any identified risks related to GESI mainstreaming? • Have any risks related to GESI mainstreaming been reflected and tracked as part of the programme's overall risk management processes? 	Yes Somewhat No	
12. Tracking and reporting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have GESI ambitions been set at outcome level in the programme logframe and reflected in GESI-specific indicators? • Is intersectional analysis of disaggregated data conducted and presented in programme reports? • Is analysis of disaggregated data and data to track GESI-specific indicators used to inform programme adaptations? 	Yes Somewhat No	

Agreed Actions

No.	Action	Accountable	Due Date
1			
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12			

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