

## OVERVIEW

**Project name:**

Gender equality, voice and power

**Project leader:**

Alice Sverdlik

**Time frame:**

September 2020–March 2021

**Objective:**

To assess IIED's understanding and ambition for integrating gender equality and intersectionality in its research and advocacy; to analyse past or ongoing work to identify emerging challenges, opportunities and next steps to embed gender equality in future research.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

IIED seeks to advance inclusive, equitable change. We are committed to conducting gender-transformative research that tackles the many and reinforcing inequalities that women and men experience. In late 2020, IIED researchers carried out a structured analysis of selected past and ongoing research to see how effectively it incorporated the issues of gender equality and intersectionality. Intersectional approaches aim to uncover exclusions based on overlapping sources of disadvantage. This assessment will inform strategies and partnerships for raising IIED's ambition to promote gender equality and address interrelated inequalities throughout our future work.

## CHANGE IN ACTION

IIED recognises that vulnerabilities, assets, capabilities, constraints and opportunities are strongly influenced by gender, as well as other social or cultural characteristics. Gender equality is integral to achieving sustainable development and environmental justice; IIED's action research has carefully investigated the significance of gender roles, dynamics and relations. We use participatory approaches to involve women and men (regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, migration status and other differences) in project design, delivery and evaluation, and particularly in co-creating transformative solutions.

# Gender and intersectionality in action research

## Taking stock, learning lessons and acting on opportunities

In 2020, a working group from IIED's Gender Equality Champions Network (GECN) carried out a structured analysis of selected IIED projects, seeking to discover to what extent gender equality and intersectional concerns had been integrated into their design, implementation and published findings. These researchers examined past achievements and identified challenges and opportunities. The group built on an earlier analysis by an independent gender consultant, creating a baseline from which to identify lessons and to define strategic priorities for future work. This assessment was not only applied to IIED projects that had a gender and intersectionality focus, but also to initiatives with other key goals and outcomes.

Across IIED's work — including project design and delivery with partners — we aim to raise our levels of gender equality ambition and to highlight the impacts that intersecting sources of disadvantage may have upon sustainable development. In IIED's latest strategy, a key goal is to challenge increasing inequalities while also promoting inclusion and justice.

## Starting point for ambition

Whatever the topic — energy, forestry, urban development or climate adaptation — IIED researchers are grappling with multiple exclusions. We design gender-equitable solutions via grassroots partnerships, although our

assessment showed that these initiatives can vary in their levels of gender ambition. IIED's projects are typically either **gender sensitive** (that is, taking steps to promote women and men's equal participation) or **gender responsive** (enhancing equitable distribution and addressing women and men's differentiated needs). Fewer projects have pursued **gender transformation**, which seeks to tackle the root causes of inequality.

## Achievements

We found that IIED's projects with the highest level of ambition — those pursuing gender transformation — have had significant impact. Examples include:

- The successful upscaling of collective action in women's entrepreneurship and strengthening of women's voices in land governance in sub-Saharan Africa
- During a project in Cambodia and Nepal, carried out with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights, women played a pivotal role in defining urban food insecurity and created an intersectional analysis of barriers to accessing food in informal settlements (considering caste, migration status and disability)
- Using findings from Tanzanian refugee camps, our research explored the gender dimensions of refugees' cooking solutions and promoted gender equality in men and women's roles in cooking and fuel collection

Our research also critically examines how gender and other axes of exclusion may affect marginalised women and men's participation in social, economic and political life and, knowing that, how we can better design and support equitable interventions.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- High-level ownership, ongoing evaluation and enhanced analytical capacities (particularly during proposal development) can ensure that gender and intersectionality are built into the entire project cycle. This creates strong potential to tackle multiple, overlapping inequalities.
- Additional funding and long-term support (both internal and external) are needed to create participatory, gender-transformative processes that enable marginalised groups to identify and advance their priorities.

## PARTNERS' VIEW

A recent piece of work with gender and intersectionality built into its entire cycle was the **Stronger Voices project**. We worked with local people and organisations in Zanzibar and Northern Tanzania to develop a community-based planning toolkit that can help identify and promote the climate priorities of marginalised groups, including women and young people. It is intended for use by local governments, producer cooperatives and community-based organisations seeking to understand and integrate local climate priorities into planning.

“Having an opportunity to use the tool [will] give us a clear picture of what the community really needs concerning women and youth empowerment.”

Angela Kagashe, development practitioner, BAWAKIMO

“Some cooperatives have changed their leadership structure...there was [previously] not even a single young person in the leadership structures. But now there are men, there are women, there are young men, there are young women as well.”

Rashid Mwinyi Rashid, chairperson, Pamoja Youth Initiative

Further reading: [www.iied.org/gender](http://www.iied.org/gender)

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Market stall, Phnom Penh, Cambodia. Women played a pivotal role in defining urban food insecurity and creating an intersectional analysis of barriers to accessing food in informal settlements in work done with the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights.

- In Zanzibar and Northern Tanzania, the Stronger Voices project co-created a community-based planning toolkit to identify the climate priorities of marginalised groups, including women and young people.

## Challenges

Many researchers acknowledged numerous practical and conceptual challenges when working on gender and intersectionality — either as a focus of their projects or as elements to integrate into research with a different focus. Common concerns included the complexity of analysing gender and other characteristics of difference; limited knowledge of how to design gender-transformative research; and the long-term engagement essential for tackling structural disadvantage. When gender-disaggregated data are collected, it can be challenging to analyse the findings if the original research questions and/or conceptual framework were not developed to focus on gender and intersectionality. Meanwhile, given IIED's emphasis on co-producing research with Southern partners, staff were sometimes unsure about how best to pursue gender and intersectionality in research if these topics were not already a local priority.

## Opportunities and next steps

These challenges often reflect IIED colleagues' need for enhanced skills and knowledge. In response, GECN is developing initiatives led by research groups and some that are institute-wide. For instance, GECN is offering an in-depth induction session, a two-stage gender analysis training course and informal lunchtime meetings to learn from external guests. At the same time,

IIED is developing a People Strategy that will include learning and development, and also develop practical steps towards promoting diversity, inclusion and belonging in the institute. Building awareness of gender and intersectionality at IIED should strengthen how subsequent research will incorporate these key concerns.

GECN researchers will also develop new funding concept notes on topics linked to gender and intersectionality, drawing on cross-cutting interests across the institute and providing ambitious examples from which all staff can learn. This will support, for instance, IIED researchers who want to analyse nutrition and energy access using a gender equality lens. There is also widespread interest in intersectional action research and how to support policy uptake of intersectional strategies.

Finally, a working group will convene dialogues to share lessons learnt from action research on gender and intersectionality, anti-racism and participatory methodologies in order to support partnerships and inform solutions that can be truly transformative.



## Knowledge Products

The International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) promotes sustainable development, linking local priorities to global challenges.