

# MRC Strategic Plan 2021-2025

## Annex 2: Gender Action Plan

---

### Introduction

This Gender Action Plan (GAP) consolidates those MRC activities of the MRC Strategic Plan (MRC SP) 2021-2025 with direct reference to gender and vulnerability (G&V) aspects and provides more detailed descriptions of the planned activities needing to factor in the G&V approach. The GAP therefore forms the basis for further operationalizing the respective conclusions from the Basin Development Strategy (BDS) and the activities under the MRC SP in relation to gender and vulnerability.

This will be done as part of the multi-year work planning process and subsequent preparation of TORs/concept notes. A Handbook has been developed and provided to support the integration of a gender and vulnerability approach when implementing the activities relating to basin-wide strategy update/development, technical guidelines update/development, and river monitoring related activities.

Sub-deliverables (milestones) determined in this GAP under each MRC SP activity will be integrated into the monitoring framework of the MRC SP. This will not only help to monitor implementation of all of MRC's measures and activities, but also contributes to systematic gender and vulnerability mainstreaming throughout MRCS. Hence, the GAP is fully integrated into the BDS and MRC SP to maximize the utilization of MRC's resources and resulting development outcomes.

The guiding principles for the integration of the GAP into the overall MRC monitoring system are to a) ensure a gender- and vulnerability-sensitive results-based monitoring and to b) contribute to collecting disaggregated data to improve informed and responsive decision-making and implementation of activities.

In the MRC's Gender Policy document<sup>1</sup>, gender equity and equality are considered an integral part of all MRC programmes, projects and activities. Effectiveness and efficiency in achieving development goals require the recognition that every MRC activity affects women and men differently and that their different perspectives, needs, interests, roles and resources should be taken into account at every stage. Gender equity and equality are, therefore, fundamental values that must be strengthened and reflected in development choices and institutional practices. The MRC is committed to mainstream gender and vulnerability aspects into all its activities as relevant and needed beyond the ones outlined in this GAP.

As outlined in the Strategic Plan, MRC SP activities support the recovery from COVID-19 and contribute to build resilience for possible similar outbreaks in the future. Table 8.1 in the SP illustrates the mainstreaming of gender and vulnerability aspects into these considerations.

The GAP will be executed by the different MRCS divisions as outlined in the SP under each activity and monitored by the M&E and gender teams under OCEO. This is consistent with

---

<sup>1</sup> MRC 2013

MRC's commitment to mainstream gender and vulnerability throughout the organisation. The MRC Gender Focal Point and M&E Specialist will support and follow up with the different units as needed and compile results accordingly.

The BDS consists of five Strategic Priorities which all include direct references to gender and vulnerability aspects. Explicit gender and vulnerability activities have been defined for most outcomes under each Strategic Priority of the MRC SP 2021-2025 and are compiled within this GAP.

Additionally, gender indicator has now been included in the MRC-IF and SOBR with the agreement by MCs. Under the Strategic Indicator of Livelihoods and employment in MRC sectors, Social Assessment Indicator "Gender equality in Employment economic engagement" has been included looking at ability for both men and women to provide for their own needs and improve their potential for future economic gain. Access to Education, reflecting Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education) is proposed as a monitoring parameter under Gender Equality given the important role of education in the economic possibilities of women and girls.

In the Indicator Framework, three gender indicators have been included namely (1) gender equality in ownership of land, (2) gender quality in education, and (3) female-male ratio of people employed in LMB water related sectors.

Sustainable development in the basin depends on equitable access and utilization of resources, social equity, the resilience of the basin population and the continued function of the Mekong ecosystem, and that economic development as well as targeted policies and actions are necessary to address inequity. The "gender and vulnerability" approach to account for intersectional inequity, the need to internalise the costs of externalities, and the different dimensions of vulnerability. This approach focuses on determining how they are impacted, where vulnerabilities lie, and what the opportunities are to improve resilience.

In the strategic cycle of 2021-2025, data collection and reporting on gender and other aspects of vulnerability, and their systematic consideration in joint planning and monitoring, will provide a basis for policy responses that help support less direct dependence of vulnerable people on river and wetland resources. This can be achieved through various intervention including but not limited to awareness raising, advocacy, capacity building and joint activities, etc.

Key social issues which find repeated consideration throughout the BDS are food security, G&V-responsive emergency management, and inequity of access and opportunities in regard to water resources, e.g. access to safe water; and inequality in paid and unpaid work. In response, this GAP is providing G&V-related guidance on selected MRC SP activities where gender & vulnerability aspects need particular consideration.

Lead Division	Outcome/ Output/ Activity/ Task	Description	Description of activity with Gender & Vulnerability (G&V) lens	Expected Sub-Deliverables
<b>Strategic Priority 1: Maintain the ecological function of the Mekong River Basin</b>				
	<b>1.3</b>	<b>Strengthened water, food and energy security for basin community well-being</b>		
	<b>1.3.1</b>	<b>Limits of acceptable change for key river and connected wetland habitats identified and implemented (related to Outputs 1.1.1, 3.1.1, 4.2.1)</b>		
	1.3.1.1	Identify and assess limits to adequately protect key regional environmental assets (i.e. wetlands) including consideration of early and quick flow into the Tonle Sap Lake and gradual flow out of the lake and other ecosystem functions and services, through <b>engagement</b> of scientific expertise, national agencies and <b>local communities.</b>	Gender-and vulnerability-sensitive engagement with local communities will be important to identify initial proposed limits of change for wetlands (Output 1.3.1) that will be further developed through an iterative testing and evaluation process under Outcome 3.1. This activity will therefore focus on developing a mechanism for engagement with local communities depending on key environmental assets (e.g. wetlands). A concept note needs to be developed to assess different options of such engagement, but initial suggestions are:	A gender and vulnerability sensitive engagement mechanism with local communities
	1.3.1.1.X	To be updated in the MWP 2023-2025	Option 1: Using the existent frame of Regional Stakeholder Forums to include a session with community- and CSO representatives from selected key regions (e.g. key wetlands areas) to collect local perspectives on limits of acceptable change. Option 2: MRC commissions local CSOs to conduct limits assessments in selected areas, including community interviews, and feeds those case study data into the overall assessment. Option 3: MRC advocates for the member countries each to conduct such local discussion forums (e.g. through national or provincial parliamentarians who regularly conduct local constituency engagement forums) or to commission case studies (implemented by local government staff or CSOs).	

			<p>Guiding questions for all three options: who is affected, in what way, by what change of the affected environmental systems? Who contributes in which way to the protection of the wetlands? How are changes exacerbating vulnerabilities and inequalities?</p> <p>By answering these questions, social limits for change can be defined for different population groups.</p>	
<b>Strategic Priority 2: Enable inclusive access and utilisation of the basin's water and related resources</b>				
	<b>2.1</b>	<b>Strengthened water, food and energy security for basin community well-being</b>		
	<b>2.1.4</b>	<b>Gender and vulnerability aspects of basin water, food and energy security addressed</b>		
	<b>2.1.4.1</b>	<p><b>Undertake a desk review and analysis, in collaboration with relevant partners, of the multiple gender and vulnerability aspects of basin water, food and energy security (including indigenous and minority ethnic groups and child labour) identifying specific needs, challenges and opportunities and including recommendations on cost effective and priority gender disaggregated data and vulnerability mapping requirements</b></p>	<p>Desk review and analysis require working with the responsible national agencies, research institutes and CSOs to collect the required disaggregated sub-national data for identifying poor natural resource users, determining where the vulnerabilities lie, and how they could benefit from national social and economic development policies and programmes, including investments in conjunction with (joint) water resources development projects.</p> <p>The scope of future disaggregated data collection and vulnerability mapping needs to be determined jointly to ensure ownership and consistency.</p>	<p>Report on gender and vulnerability related to water resources development, including recommendations on additional disaggregated data needs</p>
PD	2.1.4.1.1	<p>Review, analyse and prepare report regarding gender and vulnerability aspects of basin water, food and energy security, including data collection needs</p>	<p>While the detailed scope of the mapping needs to be determined in the planned analysis, the mapping should attempt to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- map out poor and near-poor communities in areas of key environmental (water-related) assets (e.g. based on national census data and GIS)</li> <li>- outline the regularity and severity of water-related disasters/incidents/events, and how they affect different population groups in relation to their water-, food and energy security, health, income, and time poverty</li> <li>- add further information about the communities (as available) to increase understanding about intersectional inequalities (this feeds</li> </ul>	
PD	2.1.4.1.2	<p>Work with member countries on needed changes in national disaggregated data collection based on agreed recommendations from the desk review under 2.1.4.1</p>		

			<p>directly into activity 2.1.4.3.; e.g. ethnic belonging, secondary education rates m/f, employment sectors m/f, land ownership m/f, access to credit m/f)</p> <p>The layering of these data will provide us not only with a detailed picture of the vulnerabilities and inequities amongst riparian communities, but the results of the mapping will can be used to inform both regional and national planning activities (e.g. prioritisation of flood-resistant infrastructure projects in areas of highest vulnerability; identification of communities with highest needs of timely early warning communication; inclusion of determined vulnerabilities into basin development scenarios etc.)</p> <p>The data gaps which will be identified by the analysis should be used as basis to advocate for harmonised data collection with the NMCs.</p>	
	<b>2.1.4.2</b>	<b>Enhance national disaggregated data collection and mapping on gender and vulnerability within the Data Acquisition and Generation Action Plan, including to inform SDG reporting.</b>	<p>Goes hand in hand with previous activity under 2.1.4.1, following the envisioned agreement between national agencies on data collection harmonisation. The agreed data needs will be integrated into the Data Acquisition and Generation Action Plan, including timelines for their collection. The utilisation of national CSOs is highly recommended to support more localised data collection wherever feasible.</p>	Gender and vulnerability-related data acquisition needs are integrated into the Data Acquisition and Generation Action Plan, including timelines for their collection
ED	2.1.4.2.1	To be developed in MWP 2023-2025	<p>G&amp;V-related SDG reporting will not only feed into SDG 5, but potentially also on SDGs 1, 2, 6, 8, 9, 13, and 17 (compare BDS), as determined based on acquisition possibilities.</p> <p>The activities under this output will need to be incorporated into National Indicative Plans (NIPs) as they depend substantially on national actions to be implemented. Involving local CSOs can be one measure to support national agencies in the data collection activities.</p>	
	<b>2.1.4.3</b>	<b>Analyse data and information and provide recommendations on improving equity for vulnerable groups</b>	Data and information resulting from outputs 2.1.4.1 and 2.1.4.2 are analysed under an equity lens, with particular consideration of G&V gaps and opportunities in relevant regional and national plans	Framework for equity analysis

ED	2.1.4.3.1	To be developed in MWP 2023-2025	<p>(guiding questions: who benefits how from what action &amp; policy; where are inequities in access and how are they currently addressed/can be addressed to improve equity for different groups?).</p> <p>The analysis can use the previous vulnerability mapping to scan selected regional and national plans according to the categories “potentially perpetuates inequities”, “neutral/do no harm”, “has potential to improve equity”. Recommendations and good practices can be pinpointed accordingly.</p> <p>Key areas to review can be for instance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Development of water resources-related income opportunities for different population groups</li> <li>- Development/improvement of access to clean water/energy and food security for identified vulnerable riparian communities</li> </ul>	developed and endorsed
<b>Strategic Priority 3: Enhance optimal and sustainable development of water and related sectors</b>				
	<b>3.1</b>	<b>Increased economic growth of all basin countries from more proactive regional planning</b>		
	<b>3.1.1</b>	<b>The Basin Development Plan and associated national plans for water resources development are informed by the findings of a more proactive regional planning approach</b>		
	3.1.1.1	<b>Assess options for water resources development including increasing natural and constructed water storage to support water security, irrigation, hydropower, fisheries and environmental outcomes, using GIS/EO technology and field work</b>	<p>In addition to the technical and strategic assessments planned for developing and maintaining storage options, the activity should take into account the benefits and risks to, and factor in mitigating and benefit sharing measures as part of the options, considering different trade-offs. GIS data and national census data – likely the same data used for the vulnerability mapping as mentioned under activity 2.1.4.2 – can be used to locate particularly vulnerable settlement areas.</p>	<p>1) Scenario formulation and assessment methodology report</p> <p>2) Report on the results of the initial assessment of alternative basin-wide development scenarios</p>
PD	3.1.1.1.1	Prepare comprehensive concept note with TOR for Proactive Regional Planning work including integration of activities under relevant activities related to environment (1.1.1.1 new flows, 1.2.1.1 sediment and erosion, 1.3.1.1 limits of change), economic (3.1.1.1 storage options, 3.2.2.2)		

		and climate (4.1.3.1 DSF upgrade, 4.2.1.3 communication mechanisms for water infrastructures), taking into account gender and vulnerability approach		3) Basin-wide development scenarios considering gender and vulnerability
	3.1.1.2	<b>Formulate alternative basin-wide development scenarios considering gender and vulnerability, and update the existing BDP assessment methodology</b>	G&V will be mainstreamed into relevant scenarios, while making use of the results from activities 2.1.4.1-2.1.4.3 on socio-economic and vulnerability mapping.	
PD	3.1.1.2.X	To be updated in the MWP 2023-2025	<p>The scenarios should be able to identify a) existing inequalities and inequities within the development scenarios; b) the risk of perpetuation of inequality; and c) opportunities to promote equality and equitable benefits.</p> <p>As activities under 2.1.4.1-2.1.4.3. are carried out in parallel to this activity, it is recommended to establish a timeline showing which part of the envisioned G&amp;V mapping will be covered in the initial assessment, and which aspects in the next MRC SP period.</p>	
	<b>3.2.1</b>	<b>Investment and associated measures in irrigated agriculture implemented</b>		
	3.2.1.1	<b>Coordinate development of guidelines on sustainable transboundary groundwater management and support implementation through country-to-country capacity building</b>	One aspect that will be considered by the planned policy paper will be the different factors influencing women's and men's equitable access to alternative irrigation schemes (e.g. access to credit and land, time poverty, access to trainings etc.). Global studies have shown that women and men do not automatically benefit equally from irrigation schemes, as their access and opportunities to utilize them vary. The policy paper will elaborate these factors and give recommendations on the design of equitable irrigation development. Focus herein will be on households in particularly vulnerable situations (e.g. female-led households; households defined as poor and just above the national poverty lines).	Regional guidelines for sustainable groundwater management
PD	3.2.1.1.2	Prepare drafts of case study reports on groundwater use and management for agriculture including guidelines on groundwater modelling, considering gender impact on sustainable groundwater management		
	<b>3.2.5</b>	<b>Investment and associated measures to adapt to changes in fish populations and catch composition identified and implemented</b>		

ED	3.2.5.1	<b>Support the implementation of investments and associated measures to enhance fisheries consistent with the BFMS</b>	<p>The current BFMS views gender as a key indicator, hence creating the foundation to identify and support investments and associated measures which promote gender equity in fisheries management and development. Based on the current BFMS, the following areas provide opportunities for G&amp;V-relevant measures and implementation support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Conservation of key habitats: Management and conservation of key habitats through co-management arrangements or community-based management, drawing from regional experiences.</li> <li>- Aquaculture development: Encourage Member Countries to give preferential support to aquaculture systems which provide maximum rural income and employment, and which produce fish and other aquatic organisms accessible to low-income groups, as rice fields, culture-based or enhanced fisheries.</li> <li>- Explore opportunities for capacity development/income schemes involving communities in fisheries/habitat enhancement and restoration</li> </ul> <p>Promotion of women-centred co-management of fisheries resources</p> <p>Beyond the proposed measures of the BFMS, all supported investments and measures should at least apply a “do no harm” approach in regard to social impact, and further seek opportunities to advance equity and equality particularly for the poorest communities (e.g. ensuring that environmental certifications are accessible for poor farmers).</p>	The pilot projects implemented with gender & vulnerability approach
ED	3.2.5.1.1	Implement four pilot projects to test the TG for key fish habitat restoration in the four MCs, considering gender & vulnerability approach		
ED	3.2.5.1.2	Prepare document on funding leverage for implementing the TG for key fish habitat restoration and TG for transboundary fisheries management, including identifying development partners and funding sources and preparing funding applications and applying gender & vulnerability approach		
<b>Strategic Priority 4: Strengthen resilience against climate risks, extreme floods and droughts</b>				
	<b>4.1</b>	<b>Better informed and prepared basin communities against changing river conditions, and more frequent and severe floods and droughts</b>		
	<b>4.1.3</b>	<b>Compatible Decision Support Systems in line with reinvigorated data, modelling, forecasting, and communication capabilities</b>		
	4.1.3.1	<b>Further study the design, management and use of the region’s DSS’s and plan a regional system of compatible DSS’s</b>	Even if the results of the vulnerability mapping will not be available immediately, the design of the DSS should already consider the systematic integration of some of the information to ease their	1) Design report for reinvigorated and aligned DSS’s

		<b>(MRC's DSF and Member Countries' DSS's, as well as linkages to DSS's in Upper Mekong River Basin countries)</b>	incorporation once available. The implementation of the DAGAP including the provision to MRC of the social and economic data that countries already have will be highly valuable in this regard. That should at least include data on poverty and employment sectors (gender-disaggregated if available).	at regional and national levels (2022) 2) Comprehensive spatial datasets for digital maps (including land cover) of the Lower Mekong River Basin (2023)
PD	4.1.3.1.1	Review and propose the development of the socio-economic modelling tool to strengthen the MRC modelling tool kits, within the overall work on proactive planning and upgrade of the DSF under 3.1.1 and 4.1.3		
PD	4.1.3.1.2	Develop socio-economic modelling tool to strengthen the MRC modelling tool kits within the overall work on proactive planning and upgrade of the DSF under 3.1.1 and 4.1.3		
	<b>4.1.4</b>	<b>Integrated basin-wide flood and drought forecasting and early warning</b>		
	4.1.4.1	<b>Identify member country requirements and develop an improved and integrated regional system for basin-wide flood and drought forecasting and early warning (extension to monthly forecast, three to six monthly and seasonal outlook)</b>	The developed system for forecasting and early warning will include mechanisms for systematic inclusion of information from local communities (e.g. on drought-related changes in agricultural outputs, sudden changes in water levels etc.). These established communication channels with local communities can at the same time be used to spread early warning messages by the member countries.	Design report for improved flood and drought forecasting and early warning with longer forecast and outlook, including data requirements
TD	4.1.4.1.3	Develop flood mapping linked to existing River Flood Forecasting System in selected areas along the Mekong mainstream, in consultation with countries and relevant stakeholders considering gender and vulnerability (Flood and Drought project, DC 3, supported by Japan MOFA)	It is suggested that gender-sensitive early warning communication mechanisms will be developed covering a) Vulnerability risk knowledge; b) An inclusive monitoring and warning service; c) Dissemination of meaningful warnings to those at risk; d) Response capability of communities. This will be based on results of meaningful consultations with community groups in different parts of the basin as well as international best practice examples and guidelines reflecting experiences that men and women access, process, interpret and respond to information in different ways, due to the	
TD	4.1.4.1.5	Provide national and regional trainings on flood & drought management and related subjects to national Line Agencies, taking into account gender and vulnerability communication to targeted users (incl.		

		Joint study with Thailand on basin-based water retention of the Monkey Cheeks project) (Flood and Drought project, supported by Japan MOFA)	social and cultural organization of gender relations and the gender division of labour.  Links to guides will be provided in the G&V Handbook.	
	<b>4.2</b>	<b>Better disaster management and adaptation to water resources development and climate risks</b>		
	<b>4.2.1</b>	<b>Coordinated water infrastructure operations for multiple benefits including gender and vulnerability sensitive disaster mitigation and management</b>		
PD	4.2.1.2	<b>Develop cooperation mechanisms for data and information sharing for existing dam operations (linked to JAPs) to optimise regional benefits and minimise regional costs</b>	In line with framework used under 4.1.4.1. Information sharing and communication mechanisms include the identification of effective communication lines towards communities, including considerations regarding remoteness, language barriers, and differences in accessing information for different population groups (women and men, girls and boys), and other factors as to be determined. Information on evacuation needs to address mobility challenges of some affected groups, such as people with disabilities and the elderly. This is to be integrated as much as possible with the national disaster management plans and reflected into the NIPs to be effective.	1) Report on opportunities for coordinated operating rules and governance arrangements on dam operations 2) Information sharing and communication protocols for water-related emergencies
PD	4.2.1.2.2	Develop Preliminary information sharing and communication mechanisms for existing dams for purposes of flood, drought and emergencies, considering gender and vulnerability approach		
OCEO	4.2.1.4	Develop and implement information sharing and communication protocols (including consideration of gender and vulnerability) for water-related emergencies including water quality, navigation and dam safety		
	4.2.1.4.X	To be updated in the MWP 2023-2025		
<b>Strategic Priority 5: Strengthen cooperation among all basin countries and stakeholders</b>				
	<b>5.1</b>	<b>Strengthened Mekong River Commission for more effective implementation of the Mekong Agreement</b>		
	<b>5.1.2</b>	<b>Organisational development of the Mekong River Commission</b>		

	5.1.2.1	<b>Prepare and implement an organisational development plan for the MRC towards 2030 (including the Council, JC, MRCS (and RFDMC), NMCs, NMCSs and Expert Groups) based on agreed vision of future capacity, diversity and gender, revised ROPs, organisational structure, function, and personnel, and operating arrangements</b>	<p>A review of the current diversity and gender composition throughout all MRC bodies and on different management levels will inform the respective diversity and equality goals of the organisational development plan.</p> <p>The planned expert groups are envisioned to include G&amp;V specialists/ technical specialists with experience in G&amp;V mainstreaming.</p>	Diversity and gender-responsive organisational development plan for the MRC
OCEO	5.1.2.1.2	Prepare and implement an organisational development plan for the MRC towards 2030 (including the Council, JC, MRCS (and RFDMC), NMCs, NMCSs and Expert Groups) based on agreed vision of future capacity, diversity and gender, revised ROPs, organisational structure, function, and personnel, and operating arrangements		
	5.1.2.12	Monitor, evaluate and report on the implementation of the MRC SP, NIPs and the contribution of water-related activities (projects and programmes) of Mekong-related regional cooperation mechanisms to the BDS		<p>1) MRC Annual Reports</p> <p>2) Mid-Term Review of the MRC Strategic Plan (2023)</p>
OCEO	5.1.2.12.4	Monitor and support the implementation of the Gender Action Plan 2021-2025, including the gender handbook and working aid		
	<b>5.2</b>	<b>Increased joint efforts and partnerships for more integrated management of the entire river basin</b>		
	<b>5.2.3</b>	<b>Mekong water-related cooperation mechanisms and relevant partnerships implemented in collaboration with countries</b>		
	5.2.3.4	<b>Explore the options for establishing a Mekong Fund through multiple partnerships and financing sources for the</b>	The exploration of opportunities will include considering stakeholders interested to support the adaptability of / disaster	Policy paper on options for a Mekong Fund

		<b>benefit of environmental assets and vulnerable social groups</b>		
PD	5.2.3.4.1	Finalize Concept Note for the Mekong Fund for multiple objectives (environment management, social adaptation, disaster response, etc), take into account gender & vulnerability approach	<p>management for <i>specific</i> vulnerable social groups (e.g. people with disabilities, female-led households).</p> <p>The Fund would also help address ongoing social concerns about the potential transboundary impacts of development projects in all sectors (irrigation, hydropower, navigation, tourism, fisheries, etc), and the need to help communities adapt to these changes. Optimally, the Fund would draw information from previous G&amp;V analysis, vulnerability mapping activities, and from EWS and disaster response analysis to determine priority support needs in the communities.</p> <p>The policy paper will also reflect that monitoring and financial reporting of the Fund’s resources will have to include disaggregated data of the beneficiaries.</p>	mechanism through multiple partnerships and financing sources for the benefit of environmental assets and vulnerable social groups