

Biodiversity Challenge Funds GESI Ambition

Gender Equality & Social Inclusion (GESI)

Date Published: April 2024

Last Review: April 2024

Contents

1.	Introduction to Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs)	3
2.	Defining Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)	3
3.	BCFs Ambition	4
4.	How can we achieve this?	5

1. Introduction to Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs)

The Biodiversity Challenge Funds (BCFs) is the collective term of the three funds funded by the UK Government Department of Food, Environment and Rural Affairs including the Darwin Initiative, Darwin Plus and the Illegal Wildlife Trade (IWT) Challenge Fund.

Established in 1992, the Darwin Initiative awards grants for biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction activities in eligible countries, helping these countries meet their commitments under the multilateral environment agreements, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and national policy.

The IWT Challenge Fund helps the UK Government deliver on its commitment to tackle illegal trade in wildlife. The fund was launched in 2014 and delivers on the UK's IWT Conference Series commitments by supporting projects that tackle IWT in developing countries.

The aim of Darwin Plus is to help deliver long-term strategic outcomes for the natural environment in the UK Overseas Territories (OTs). The fund helps to meet commitments under OT and UK policies, multilateral environment agreements and the SDGs.

2. Defining Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI)

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) is comprised of two key terms, the BCFs define these as follows:

- **Gender Equality:** is about addressing inequalities and transforming the distribution of opportunities, choices and resources available to girls, women and non-binary individuals so that they have equal power to shape their lives and participate in the process thereby increasing equality between people of all genders.
- **Social Inclusion:** refers to the process of improving the terms of individuals and groups to take part in society, and the process of improving the ability, opportunity and dignity of people disadvantaged and historically excluded from decision making and spheres of influence on the basis of their identity to take part in society.

The BCFs understand Disability Inclusion to be included within Social Inclusion i.e. understanding the relationship between how people function and participate in society and ensuring the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity and the promotion and mainstreaming of their rights¹.

The BCFs consider Indigenous People and Local Communities (IPLC) to be included within Social Inclusion as they have been disadvantaged and historically excluded from decision making based on their identity.

To shape and inform all biodiversity conservation and poverty reduction actions, it is vital to understand gender and social characteristics in differentiating biodiversity practices, knowledge acquisition and usage, as well as inequalities in control over resources. An understanding of these characteristics further identifies the

¹ Please see the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy: [UN Disability Inclusion Strategy english.pdf](#)

ways in which those affected by exclusion and discrimination are unable to access the same economic opportunities. Addressing these inequalities and ensuring equal participation of all therefore has a direct linkage with individuals having the ability to meet their basic needs whether that be a lack of access to income or services such as healthcare, security and education. There is therefore a direct link between considerations of GESI and poverty reduction i.e. without a consideration of GESI the aim of ending poverty (UN's Sustainable Development Goal 1: No Poverty) cannot be achieved.

Due to the diversity of projects within the BCFs portfolio, we acknowledge that these definitions provide a starting point and that GESI considerations may vary depending on a variety of elements including the nature and context of the project. All projects are required however to actively consider GESI within both project design and implementation and meet the minimum expected standard, outlined in the subsequent section.

Further it has been noted that considerations of GESI are crucial to developing stronger projects and programming that provide a better understanding of differentiated, and intersectional relationships with the environment (knowledge, needs, roles and priorities). It further identifies the different ways in which different identities access, use and control natural resources and services and supports equal (or equitable) opportunities to benefit from environmental policy and projects for all stakeholders.

As noted, the BCFs are rooted in the UK Government's commitments to the SDGs and as such pledge to leave no-one behind. The UK Government has further made multiple commitments to delivering on gender-responsive programming with the International Women and Girls Strategy stating a commitment to "at least 80% of FCDO's bilateral aid programmes having a focus on gender equality by 2030". The BCFs also have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) to consider how our actions affect people who are protected² under the Equality Act 2010.

The GESI ambition for BCFs therefore sets out to support more impactful and successful projects, and to support the UK Government's commitments.

This statement supports previous work and defines the BCFs' ambition and ongoing commitment to integrating GESI within its programming and how this will be achieved for applicants, projects and other external stakeholders. This statement will be regularly reviewed on an annual basis.

3. BCFs Ambition

The BCFs commit to being a GESI Sensitive programme.

Our ambition is for all projects within the BCFs portfolio to meet the minimum expected standard of GESI Sensitive. While many projects are already meeting this standard, with some going further, this commitment seeks to support all projects to achieve the required minimum standard with an explicit aim of the programme to inclusively build capability and capacity and encourage those that can, to go further.

Defra defines GESI Sensitive as understanding the social context that programmes are operating in. A GESI Sensitive approach requires project partners to demonstrate programming will "do no harm", not exacerbate inequality and ensure meaningful and context appropriate engagement and participation of those involved in

² The characteristics that are protected in relation to the public sector equality duty are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.

the project. With the clear links, Safeguarding policies and procedures should also be established and effectively managed by all project partners with interventions completing due diligence, risk mitigation and assessing the impact of interventions of women and men and the relationships between them.

Defra acknowledges that work will be required to establish how to efficiently and effectively support projects to meet this standard and deliver on this through the various funds and schemes.

All projects seeking funding under the three funds will be required to demonstrate that they understand the GESI context in which the project aims to or is working within to ensure:

- activities take contextual factors into account in the design and implementation of the project,
- inclusive and meaningful participation of all those engaging with the project, and
- the project is not contributing to or creating any further inequalities.

These requirements are essential for a project to meet the GESI Sensitive standard. However, it is acknowledged that within the GESI Sensitive ambition projects will approach and deliver elements to differing degrees. Therefore while the above points are requirements, projects are encouraged to consistently meet the minimum requirements and push beyond these to deepen and improve their GESI contribution where they can.

For information on how to achieve a more ambitious GESI approach, please see the table below:



4. How can we achieve this?

To meet our GESI Sensitive commitment, the BCFs have developed a five year Action Plan to enable this Strategy. The table below provides an outline of the key aspects the BCFs will mobilise to ensure this is achieved.

Core Concepts & Building Awareness (resources/ training)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Ensure all guidance and forms for both applicants and projects are revised to enable GESI Sensitive approach as requirement. (ii) Provide applicants and projects with support (materials and resources) and release initial comms to projects around key terminologies. (iii) Introduce GESI Risk and GESI Analysis as a requirement for all applicants and projects, supported by guidance. (iv) Provide additional support on effective Monitoring and Evaluating of GESI.
---	--

Internal Process & Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) GESI training provided annually to all Expert Committee members and external reviewers. (ii) Develop GESI assessment guidelines as a resource pack for Experts and Reviewers. (iii) Focus on recruiting GESI expertise for Expert Committees and external reviewers. (iv) Updating assessment methodology and scoring criteria for both applications and for project reporting.
Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Utilise data captured from ongoing projects and their Standard Indicators to monitor GESI results, including disaggregation, and look at ways to strengthen. (ii) Require annual self-assessment of GESI ambition by projects. (iii) Conduct portfolio analysis based on project level reporting (including GESI analysis and results reporting) to inform an assessment of progress, develop recommendations and build an understanding of GESI risks. (iv) Mid-point review of five year Action Plan conducted to check quality of GESI with applications and projects at reporting. (v) Assess impact of Strategy in year four.