

INTERACT-BIO DIALOGUE

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN WATERBERG DISTRICT  
MUNICIPALITY, LIMPOPO



April 2024 | South Africa

**INTERACT-Bio**  
Integrated action on biodiversity



## 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE GENDER-NATURE NEXUS

### Gender and biodiversity Target 23 (Ensure Gender Equality and a Gender-Responsive Approach for Biodiversity Action)

Gender refers to an individual's social gender as opposed to sex, which is biologically determined. It includes socially constructed gender roles and relationships, perceptions and expectations. These factors are contextual, dynamic, and open to change. They are reflected in such areas as social standards, legislation, traditions, religion and so on (GIZ Gender Strategy, 2019).

Gender mainstreaming is a globally applied strategy of systematically considering the diverse needs and conditions of the different genders, as well as the impacts of any actions on them, with the aim of achieving gender justice. Gender mainstreaming is a process of (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of political and non-political activities and processes at all levels, thus ensuring that the experiences and needs of all genders are integral elements in the design, implementation and evaluation of all policies and programmes. The aim is to reduce discrimination and inequalities, secure equal benefit for all genders and harness potential. Gender mainstreaming is a supplementary strategy and not intended as a substitute for policies, programmes, projects, legal provisions, institutional mechanisms or interventions which are specifically aimed at gender equality.

The project incorporated an in-person dialogue to introduce gender mainstreaming in the pilot region, Waterberg. Gender mainstreaming involves considering the diverse needs, roles, and perspectives of both women and men throughout all stages of policy development, implementation, and evaluation. Gender mainstreaming in biodiversity is essential for promoting fairness, effectiveness, diversity, empowerment, and resilience in conservation efforts. Examining biodiversity initiatives through a gender lens, allows us to uncover and address the unique challenges, opportunities, and contributions of different genders in environmental conservation and protection. It promotes the inclusion of diverse perspectives, leading to more comprehensive and holistic approaches to biodiversity conservation.

## 2. DIALOGUE ON GENDER MAINSTREAMING

This dialogue forms part of a series of dialogues intended to bring together national, sub-national, local, and private sector actors for vertical and horizontal integration. The gender mainstreaming dialogue was hosted in April 2024 in Modimolle, Limpopo, and was facilitated by the ICLEI Africa. The dialogue took a presentation-style format where organisations and individuals were invited to speak about their experience and expertise on the topic of gender mainstreaming. This was followed by a facilitated questions and answers session.

The session focused on the significance of adopting a human rights approach as the foundational framework for biodiversity protection and conservation endeavours. Throughout the session, how mainstreaming gender and a human rights approach can synergistically enhance the effectiveness, equity, and sustainability of biodiversity conservation initiatives was examined.



## The panelists and their presentations:



Bongiwe Simka: Professional Officer:  
Biodiversity, Nature and Health, ICLEI Africa

Bongiwe focussed on the lessons learned from the Urban Natural Assets (UNA) project implemented by ICLEI Africa and unpacked the human rights-based approach adopted in the project. Urban Natural Assets (UNA) aims to transform development trajectories for African cities towards those that improve the sustainable development of, and interconnectedness with their surrounding natural systems along three interlinked urban pillars, governance, planning, and finance, through building urban resilience, sufficient agency and momentum for an unfolding process of transformative change. The project supports local governments in Africa to protect and revitalise their urban natural assets by integrating nature-based solutions (NbS) into city planning activities. This is being implemented in Sierra Leone and Ghana. A human rights approach was at the centre of the project. This was delved into in this session alongside gender.



Amy Sullivan: PHD - Interdisciplinary Ecology with a  
concentration in Women's Studies

Amy spoke about gender and its relation to biodiversity and emphasised that all people can engage with resources for the same reasons and benefits. When we are unpacking gender in biodiversity, we should be asking the question of biodiversity conservation and climate action for WHAT? In this case, in support of human rights to safe and healthy lives. That brings in where, how, and who? WHO opens the door to different women and different men—by sex, age, urban/rural, ethnicity, immigration status, education, etc. The differences between men and women will be impacted by biodiversity differently. A classic gender analysis question is which women and which men—rather than just male or female. Women and men have critical roles as biodiversity protectors, producers, consumers, processors, etc.



Zane Silinda: Gender Focal Point – Deutsche Gesellschaft für  
Internationale Zusammenarbeit's (GIZ) Climate Cluster South Africa  
Mitigation, Monitoring & Evaluation and Policy Governance Advisor

Zane unpacked the meaning of gender and spoke to the gender continuum and unpacked how GIZ works with the concept of gender and gender mainstreaming within their organisation. The organisation looks at gender mainstreaming in action and has gender equality enshrined in its corporate values and as a guiding principle. GIZ released a gender strategy in 2019 that binds all GIZ employees and its projects to take gender equality as a guiding principle. GIZ believes in a top-down approach. What the leaders do, others will follow. GIZ offers several trainings on gender mainstreaming.



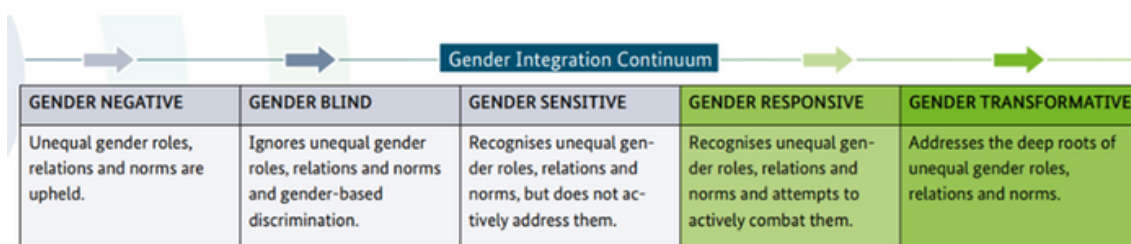
Lindiwe Khumalo: Control Environmental Officer: Grade B in the Sector Performance  
Monitoring and Reporting unit from Business Performance and Strategic  
Management: Department of Forestry Fisheries and the Environment

South Africa's commitment to advancing women's empowerment and gender equality is informed by the commitment to the transformation of the country from an unequal apartheid state to one that is free, just, and based on democratic values. The Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment (DFFE) is the custodian of coordinating initiatives for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality within the Environment Sector. The speaker unpacked the gender mainstreaming environment in South Africa from a governmental perspective and delved into several policies at the national level that focus specifically on gender mainstreaming. These included; strategy towards Gender Mainstreaming for the environment sector, the National Biodiversity Economy Strategy, and the Biodiversity Conservation Sector Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for the Biodiversity Economy Sector.

### 3. EMERGING THEMES AND LESSONS LEARNT

#### What does gender mainstreaming include?

Gender mainstreaming involves the following: making men's and women's concerns and experiences an integral part of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all sectors of society; changing policies and institutions so that they actively promote gender equality; rethinking socio-cultural values and development goals in the long-term.



*Gender Integration Continuum (source: authors' own presentation, based on UN INSTRAW/UN Women, Glossary of Gender-related terms and concepts).*

The Gender Integration Continuum is a framework that categorises approaches by how they treat gender norms and inequities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of program/policy.

The term “gender blind” refers to policies and programs that are designed without prior analysis of the culturally defined set of economic, social, and political roles, responsibilities, rights, entitlements, obligations, and power relations associated with being female and male and the dynamics between and among men and women, boys and girls. Gender-blind programs/policies ignore gender considerations altogether. In contrast, “gender aware” programs/policies deliberately examine and address the anticipated gender-related outcomes during both design and implementation. An important prerequisite for all gender-integrated interventions is to be gender-aware (Interagency Gender Working Group, 2017).

Gender lives in the assumptions of who does what, with what and why. Because it reflects our expectations of how women and men, boys and girls behave.

Gender is based upon power dynamics and who decides. For example, access and control of natural resources like water and trees. Or who gets a seat at the decision making table and whose voice is heard. In South Africa, there are gendered spaces, that change over time - the roles and expectations shift - and from place to place.

#### Why gender and biodiversity?

The key is a clear understanding of the gendered nature of people's engagement with biodiversity and biodiversity's impact on different people. Aim for an intentional approach that helps set clear gender goals in pursuit of equality. Who is at the table? And is 50/50 really the goal? and how do we set those goals?

There are ways and tools to help us at a local level to understand how different people are engaging and how they are impacted. Unpacking realities of gender and biodiversity with activities like:

- Safety audits: a useful technique for putting different women and different men and working in the built environment- you send people out into a place for example parks and you ask them how they perceive the place - are there vulnerabilities - why and how?
- Access and control profiles: link this to biodiversity or developed areas- who decide who gets access to which resources in which ways and who access those.
- Mapping exercises: a way to encourage women, men, girls, and boys to map out their perception of a place and to document that and ensure that their voices are heard through imaging. This doesn't allow for the power dynamics to be excluded anyway
- Seasonal calendars: more common in rural settings can help unpack seasonal demands on resources and infrastructure - it can map out high-stress times.

### Entry points for gender mainstreaming within biodiversity and conservation

The main issues that came up in South Africa with mainstreaming gender and biodiversity into conservation are; integrating a gender perspective in the decisive socio-political, economic, and cultural aspects of conservation and coastal management. Ensuring that a gender perspective is explored for the incorporation of important knowledge, skills, and experiences into all conservation programmes. Taking into account gender mainstreaming principles toward enhancing the sustainability of environmental resource use on land and in the oceans and coastal environments. Ensuring equal participation of both women and men as beneficiaries of oceans and coasts in terms of harvesting needs which currently need to be improved and prioritised.

### Gender lessons learnt from the Urban Natural Assets (UNA) project

Human rights are not given – they are inherent, inalienable, universal, interdependent, and indivisible. Taking a human rights approach creates an environment for open access to correct and accurate information and informed, unbiased decision making processes. It is about creating a space for accountability not just from State actors but also non-state actors and allows us to look at rights versus responsibilities. There was a need for a participatory approach, where people participate in the process of human development as right-bearers and not just recipients/beneficiaries.

The next question is how can we create an enabling environment? There is hesitation when it comes to gender due to cultural beliefs, religious beliefs, lack of awareness, lack of belief in the legal system, and the belief that human and gender rights discourses are not African.

Examples of gender stereotypes found in Ghana:  
1. ɔbaa adwene akvikvim sɛ ne nofo  
The woman's mind is as twisted as her breasts  
2. ɔbaa kuta a, ɔtwa no aɛnkum mu  
If anything important goes to a woman,  
she misuses it

Therefore, in order to strengthen an enabling environment, it is important to focus on targeted and target context-specific responses that are guided by data and research to understand the following: Understanding gender rights fulfilment and access in the context of biodiversity and climate change adaptations

- Women's access to and ownership of land resources
- Women's role(s) in decision making
- Women's participation in community affairs
- Societal perceptions of women's roles
- Access to opportunities and funding to enhance their resilience

It is important to understand the vulnerabilities and the intersectionalities. It is also important to undertake an assessment of the current legal and policy landscape in order to strengthen gender considerations in the political landscape.

The way the UNA project has integrated a human rights-based approach was done through 4 ways:

1. Prioritise representation: Here the project looked to build on a holistic approach of issues- we want both men and women in the room to partake in the project - set on a minimum of 50/50
2. Unpack the conceptual understanding of human rights- this speaks to the history of human rights in Africa and human rights is something that existed in the pre-colonial era. Vernacularisation of human rights - how does this affect people's cultures and beliefs?
3. Onboarding gender rights: the project aimed to create an understanding of human rights so that people can understand what it is. Gender rights are a type of human right. Dismantle stereotypes and biases around gender. At this point the project advocates for change across traditional and religious norms and values
4. Understanding and breaking down power dynamics



## The National gender strategies (South Africa)

Women remain an integral part of environmental management, planning, and decision-making and their participation thereof is critical. Considering gender issues in relation to biodiversity involves identifying the influence of gender roles and relations on the use, management, and conservation of biodiversity. Women and men undertake different roles in the use, management, and conservation of biodiversity due to the Division of labour. However, women act as primary caretakers and managers of biological resources. Gender roles result in women and men developing different knowledge about different species in relation to the use, management, and conservation of those species. Gender differences are evident in unequal economic opportunities and unequal access to rights, which in turn leaves women vulnerable to biodiversity loss, climate change, and natural disasters. Exposing and understanding the gender-differentiated biodiversity practices and knowledge of both genders enhances biodiversity conservation.

1. Strategy towards Gender Mainstreaming for the environment sector: This National Gender Policy Framework led by the Ministry of Women, guides efforts to address South Africa's gender inequalities. It promotes equal access to resources and redefines public and private interactions through a supportive institutional framework. The strategy encourages gender-sensitive management in the environment sector, ensuring policies and projects integrate gender considerations. It highlights the importance of gender analysis and mainstreaming throughout the project cycle. Key objectives include offering strategic guidance for gender mainstreaming, practical steps for implementation in the environmental sector, and outlining funding opportunities to support these initiatives. The aim is to create inclusive, equitable policies that empower both women and men in environmental governance and decision-making processes.
2. The National Biodiversity Economy Strategy (2016) aims to transform and commercialize South Africa's biodiversity sector through activities like game breeding, hunting, game viewing, harvesting, processing, and product development. It supports the country's shift to a Green Economy and contributes to job creation and poverty reduction, especially in rural areas rich in indigenous biological resources. The strategy encourages sustainable growth in the wildlife and bioprospecting industries by enhancing entrepreneurship, ensuring sustainability, and addressing barriers to growth. It outlines stakeholder roles and includes mechanisms to monitor progress. Ultimately, it promotes an inclusive and equitable biodiversity economy by ensuring fair access to resources, equitable processes, and balanced distribution of benefits across communities.

3. Biodiversity Conservation Sector Gender Mainstreaming Strategy for Biodiversity Economy Sector. The overall objectives of the gender strategy are to contribute to the transformation and growth of the biodiversity economy sector through institutionalisation of gender-responsive programming (planning and budgeting), implementation, monitoring, and reporting systems. In addition, the strategy aims to improve gender equality in the biodiversity economy sector and redress the existing disparities. For successful implementation of the strategies, there is a need for intergovernmental cooperation between all involved partners in the biodiversity sector.

## 4. OUTCOMES OF THE DIALOGUE

Growing up in a system where men have certain roles means that you might never see something wrong with men being so dominant in certain aspects. This is why education and awareness are important in order to turn around the existing perceptions.

- We need to become intentional when we say our projects will include gender mainstreaming and move away from exploitative gender mainstreaming to a more transformative approach.
- We cannot determine how we are progressing if we don't understand where we are - what are the current gaps and how can we work towards closing those gaps? Incorporating gender rights and mainstreaming gender into projects is a very long and intentional process guided by significant learning.
- We need to focus on the understanding of the roles before we consider the reallocation of resources. We can speak about balance once we are getting local and specific - these issues start at a household level. Gender is sensitive because we can talk about it analytically but then have to go home and play our role. We need to think about roles and responsibilities and how these feed into the human rights perspective.
- Emphasis is placed on the need for aggregated data – with gender data we can make evidence-based decisions based on where we are and inform our responses.
- Including women in certain activities can also allow for the upskilling of women.
- IKI has thematic calls that are open specifically to gender. GIZ now has a mandatory requirement to consider the gender aspects of projects. Organisations applying for funding need to ensure their project outlines how they will be achieving gender justice.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, navigating the intricate landscape of gender roles and perceptions demands a concerted effort toward education, awareness, and transformative action. We must shift from mere tokenism to genuine integration of gender considerations into all facets of our projects. Understanding the current gaps and actively working to address them through monitoring, evaluation, and intentional gender mainstreaming is imperative. Real progress begins at the grassroots level, acknowledging and reshaping roles within households before broader societal change can occur.

Aggregated gender data empowers evidence-based decision-making, while inclusive participation uplifts and upskills women. After two decades of grappling with vulnerabilities and inequality, initiatives like the IKI and mandates from organisations such as GIZ underscore the growing imperative to prioritise gender justice in project planning and execution. Moving forward, it is not just about meeting requirements; it's about embodying a commitment to equity and empowerment in every endeavour.

### INTERACT-Bio project at a glance

**Full title:** Integrated subnational action for biodiversity: Supporting implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans through the mainstreaming of biodiversity objectives across city-regions

**Funded by:** The INTERACT-Bio project is funded through the International Climate Initiative (IKI) implemented by the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV), Climate Action (BMWK) in close cooperation with the Federal Ministry for the Environment, and the Federal Foreign Office (AA).

**Project duration:** Seven years - January 2017 to April 2024

**Project countries:** Brazil, India, Tanzania, China, South Africa and Colombia

Supported by:



based on a decision of  
the German Bundestag

