

BRIEFING NOTE 9

# Benefits for women in Nile economic development



Women and girls often risk being left behind in development, not being fully informed or involved in decision making about issues that can have a real impact on their lives. Sometimes, they are already disadvantaged by cultural and legal norms that affect their rights to resources. Working together to develop the Nile resource, the 10 countries involved in the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) are making it 'business as usual' to ensure gender equality in the economic benefits emerging from their shared efforts.

The NBI pays close attention to the specific challenges facing women and girls in development and management of the Nile resource, and has:

Firmly placed gender within core NBI structures, policies, programs, strategies, and procedures.

Developed **30** projects of regional significance that are gender-inclusive and bring equitable benefits to women and men.

Supported national commitments on gender, helping countries to mainstream gender in water policies and programs.

Through this, it is ensuring that women and girls are not left out of the picture of development benefits arising from the emerging projects and that women can play an equal role in driving the transformation forward.

## Women – a vital role in development

The Nile River offers a significant resource for economic growth in a region characterized by poverty and development challenges such as environmental degradation, climate change, and population growth. For this reason, the 10 countries of the Nile Basin have come together in a program of cooperation implemented largely by the NBI to work towards regional economic development through equitable use of their shared resource.

In furthering development of the region, the NBI has made an important shift from a gender-neutral approach to pay close attention to the challenges facing women and girls. Women and girls are known to be disproportionately impacted by development challenges for a number of reasons, including:

- They are more likely to be extremely poor - 70% of the world's poorest and most marginalized people are female.
- Women typically are highly dependent on natural resources for their livelihoods, and for cooking, feeding their families and raising incomes for schooling children.
- Women and girls often have less access and rights to natural resources because of traditional roles and customs in land titling and inheritance that often favor men.

From a water-use point of view, these constraints are important. For example, women may be unable to access water services at a household level or to gain permits to take water for irrigation because they do not hold the land rights or titles. Or they may not be involved in discussions relating to water-use or land-use planning that can have a significant impact on their day-to-day lives and livelihood opportunities.

Inadequate energy supplies are also a development constraint for women, meaning that they spend hours collecting woodfuel instead of being productive. It also reduces earnings from enterprises and work that relies on electricity

It is now widely recognized that women's needs should always be taken into account, and that women should be given an equal voice and opportunity to be involved in and benefit from development projects. Involving women also brings to the table their knowledge on water and natural resource management. Ensuring equality for women on decisions about water is critical for their social and economic empowerment, and plays a vital role in strengthening community resilience.

## Gender at the heart of the NBI

Recognizing these gender issues – and reflecting the objective of equitable economic development for the region through shared use of the Nile water resource – the NBI sees gender mainstreaming as essential to its work. In 2006, the NBI held a landmark event – 'Women of and women in the NBI' – that launched its program of mainstreaming gender, acknowledging women as priority stakeholders. This committed the 10 NBI member countries to prioritize access to safe and adequate water, sanitation, and food for every woman, man and child.

Gender mainstreaming is a globally accepted strategy for promoting gender equality. Mainstreaming is not an end in itself but a strategy, an approach, a means to achieve the goal of gender equality. Mainstreaming involves ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities.

From [www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gendermainstreaming.htm](http://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/gendermainstreaming.htm)

The NBI has adopted the concepts of gender and gender mainstreaming as key facets of its structures, programming, and processes. This mainstreaming effort also reflects and supports international development practices, policies and the ongoing commitments made to these by national governments. Policy directives, manuals, and guidelines for gender mainstreaming in integrated water resource management have been issued by ministries responsible for water affairs in virtually all the Nile Basin countries.

The NBI has addressed gender mainstreaming in two main ways. First, at the organizational level, through core NBI policies, strategies, and procedures; and, second, at the practical level through the work of the two Subsidiary Action Programs (SAPs) which help the countries to prepare transboundary development projects for investment. In this way, gender cross-cuts through all NBI work.

**The NBI – based on a shared vision among the 10 countries.** The shared vision in practice took a two-pronged approach. It started by working through a Shared Vision Program (SVP) to build trust, capacity, and an enabling environment for investments, and then moving on to develop and implement Subsidiary Action Programs (SAPs) that would prepare projects for investment.

The NBI provides a regional platform for the joint, Basin-wide efforts towards this vision. Nile-SEC has focused on cooperation through capacity building and sharing information. Meanwhile, efforts on the SAP objectives to get projects off the ground have been led by ENTRO, based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and the NELSAP Coordination Unit, based in Kigali, Rwanda.



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The SAPs have been successful in preparing ‘investment projects’ – joint development projects for countries to implement together, sharing both the costs and the benefits. For example, the Flood Preparedness and Early Warning System (FPEWS) project is already reducing flood disaster risks in Ethiopia and Sudan for 350,000 people, and the 80 MW Rusumo Falls project on the borders of Burundi, Rwanda, and Tanzania promises significant increases in electricity supply in these very power-poor countries

## Gender mainstreaming across the institution

At the organizational level, the NBI has emphasized the development and adoption of gender-inclusive strategies. Within the NBI, gender mainstreaming activities have included:

- Conducting a gender assessment. The 2008 assessment for the whole of the NBI made gender mainstreaming recommendations, including the need to develop a policy framework to guide gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment, to create institutional frameworks for mainstreaming gender, and to develop and implement a gender-related capacity-building program for NBI staff. This was followed up by a full gender audit at NELSAP In 2013.
- Establishing the gender working group. Members of the working group were drawn from all NBI bodies and partner organizations to oversee the gender mainstreaming activities. The group formulated a gender equality action plan and a capacity-building plan for the NBI, which is now implemented. The working group also developed gender mainstreaming guidelines and checklists for different themes, to be used by program and project staff to mainstream gender in all NBI activities, including at SAP level.
- Strengthening institutional capacity. Staff across the NBI and its different programs and projects have been given gender mainstreaming training and capacity-building opportunities. In addition, a gender focal point was appointed in the NBI's secretariat, Nile-SEC. There is increasing institutional knowledge now available on gender.

- Gender-sensitivity training. NBI employees have received this in relation to internal policy and practice.
- Formulating policy and strategy. The 2012 Gender Mainstreaming Policy and Strategy was formulated to guide gender mainstreaming in all NBI programs, and capacity development inputs have supported implementation of this.
- Identifying good practices. An assessment in 2014 documented best practices in use across NBI's programs and projects, and these are being proactively integrated into all NBI activities.

These activities have led to an increase in participation of women at all levels within NBI institutions, programs, and project activities, including in leadership, decision-making, project management and implementation, and training and capacity-building programs. For example, the ENTRO internship program has recorded an increase in participation of women over time – from 11% in the 2011/12 program to 31% in the 2013/14 program. This has increased the number of young women equipped to confidently take on leadership roles in water resource management in the future.

“NBI studies provided field evidence that women play a central role in the provision, management, and safeguarding of water resources, hence the need to ensure gender equity in all water basin programs. The main result is that consideration of gender issues is now mandatory in all water programs,” Mbogo Futakamba, Acting Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Water, Tanzania.

## Gender mainstreaming in the SAPs

Within the work of the SAPs, major steps have been made to embed gender considerations. The SAPs have incorporated an approach that recognizes the central role of equal opportunities for women and men in realizing the NBI's shared vision through transboundary development projects.

Building on the work to mainstream gender considerations across the whole NBI, the SAPs have incorporated gender into their work in a number of key ways.

**Institutional promotion of gender issues.** There have been gender mainstreaming courses for staff in both the NELSAP and ENTRO offices, which have helped their staff consider gender issues in project preparations. The SAPs have also incorporated gender aspects into other technical training courses and promoted women's participation, for example in training on management of land acquisition, resettlement, and rehabilitation, and on transboundary planning for integrated water resource management. Projects being implemented have brought together both male and female staff, promoting equal opportunity in project staffing. NELSAP conducted a gender audit in 2013 that recommended ways to integrate gender into all NELSAP interventions, and a number of SAP level programming tools have been used – including social and gender analysis, NELSAP's gender mainstreaming guidelines and checklists for projects, ENTRO's social assessment guidelines, and the mainstreaming of gender across the project management cycle.

**Development of gender-inclusive projects.** These institutional activities and tools have ensured that all the

project preparation processes (e.g. feasibility studies and project design) have placed emphasis on gender issues. In the preparation of the Kagera River Basin Project, for example, specific interventions were integrated to address gender issues. Equal participation by women was promoted in the decision-making processes and in the management of both community-based small-scale investments and the longer-term and large-scale investments. In addition, the project design focused on female-headed households, supporting greater access by women to credit, and forming a women's project advisory council and cultivating an equal opportunities employment policy in the project itself.

The SAPs have formulated gender action plans as part of the project preparation process, with clear gender targets and monitoring indicators. Guidelines and checklists have been formulated to provide guidance to project managers (and their partners and consultants), giving them practical tools that help them to incorporate a gender approach into projects and to predict and manage gender-related problems that projects might encounter. Guidance has been tailored to different types of project (for example, water supply and sanitation, irrigation, hydropower, energy networks, watershed management, and flood management).

In NELSAP, there is recognition that women face significant domestic burdens in relation to water, energy, and feeding their families. Projects are prepared to include interventions that focus on benefits for women – including activities that harvest rainwater, improve food security, and increase income diversification.

**NELSAP's Social development work** – bringing gender balance to project preparation. This program helps project developers to consider how the project will affect people, and what actions are required to mitigate negative impacts. Within the program, there is specific budget allocation for gender issues. During project preparation, social analysis considers constraints and opportunities for gender mainstreaming, and specific gender design features are then included in the project. For example, in projects where dam construction may result in displacement of communities, the Social Development Program and gender guidelines ensure resettlement plans take gender into consideration. In Rwanda, as part of the Rusumo Falls project preparation, the social analysis resulted in the NBI requiring that land could not be titled solely in a husband's name, in order to protect women from being dispossessed.

ENTRO is also making great strides on gender integration in its projects in a difficult environment. In the Tana Beles Watershed Management Project in Ethiopia – a country that has some of the lowest gender equality performance indicators in Sub-Saharan Africa – women comprise 30% to 40% of members on all the project's local management committees. The flagship Tana Beles project is also coordinated at the local (woreda) level by a woman.

**Enhanced monitoring for evidence of gender benefits.** A comprehensive results-based system of monitoring has been introduced as a core tool for

monitoring project progress. This is linked to the gender action plans developed at project preparation stage, which include gender targets and indicators. The SAPs have introduced the collection of sex-disaggregated data from projects, relating to women's access to natural resources, their participation, benefits, and impacts on them.

Consequently, the transboundary development projects prepared by the NBI place a real emphasis on planning to get development right for both women and men, and are beginning to collect data to demonstrate that they are achieving this in practice.

**Supporting female leadership:** Eleni Tesfaye works in the local government agriculture office, in one of the Tana Beles project areas. She was sponsored by the NBI to complete an MSc, and GIS studies. Eleni coordinates community mobilization locally, and her role includes ensuring that income-generating activities that support women are incorporated into the Tana Beles project activities. She also works on the GIS and project database, and thanks to the training received through the NBI she has been able to put in place a good information management system. Despite being young and female, she provides effective leadership for project implementation at the community level and she is well-respected.



### Gender integration in action – the Mara sub-basin integrated watershed management project.

The Mara project is one of the investment projects that has been prepared by NELSAP, and it is ready to be implemented by governments in Kenya and Tanzania. The planning process focused on involving women throughout the catchment management process. Consultative meetings targeted women, and helped them to consider and identify appropriate income-generating activities.

Within the guiding cooperative framework for the proposed project is the gender strategy and action plan. This emphasizes gender equality and the role of women as both managers and decision makers in water management. The plan includes actions to:

- Ensure equal opportunities for women in consultation and decision making about the project.
- Consider institutional issues, for example proposing the formation of a women's council to ensure a channel for ongoing dialogue with women about their views on the project.
- Include criteria that relate to women's participation for selecting target districts and potential community projects.
- Help address problems faced by women in accessing resources and generating incomes, including proposals for livelihood support sub-projects.

The main principle is to integrate women into all activities, rather than having 'women-specific' activities.

### Gender integration in action - the Lakes Edward and Albert project.

NELSAP prepared this project on integrated fisheries and water resource management in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to contribute to improving food security. During the pilot phase, women were identified as key beneficiaries because of their role in securing household food needs through reliance on the lakes. Female fisherfolk were trained and their capacity built to better enable them to monitor the water quality and fish stocks, as well as improve their fishing practices and processing efficiency. This helps the women get better products to market and improve their livelihoods in a sustainable way. In the second phase of this project, gender is being mainstreamed across the project activities. At the policy level, gender issues will be considered in the harmonization of fisheries regulations, ensuring a legislative framework that supports gender equity. At the operational level, the project will ensure equity in resource management processes: while the fishing is largely undertaken by men, post-harvest activities of processing and trading is largely managed by women so women need to be involved in decisions about the resource. For many of these women, income from the fish business can make a real difference to their lives. It is often their only source of cash income in a society where men typically control the cash generation activities of households.

# Influencing national commitments on gender

The Nile Basin countries are committed to improving the role of women in water resource management and development. The NBI has contributed to helping them implement this commitment through information, networking, engagement, and training. For example, in Kenya there are now gender focal points in the relevant ministries. The NBI has worked with these focal points to build their capacity and give them the information and tools to help them mainstream gender in their sector.

The NBI established a women's network as an advocacy group to ensure NBI initiates project activities that impact women at the grassroots level. This enhanced channels of communication to and from women of the Nile. There is a strong sense that, alongside gender mainstreaming and other training, this networking has shifted norms. Now, there is better understanding and integration of gender issues in water policies and programs, and women are better placed to take up decision making and management positions in projects and government.

For example:

- In Ethiopia, the NBI built the capacity of the Ministry of Women Affairs Office (WAO): Semunesh Golla, in the Ministry of Water, Energy and Irrigation, states: "This puts the WAO in a better position to uphold women's rights on equal opportunity employment and promotion to senior positions like Directors."
- In Sudan, gender issues are now included in national policies and legislation: Ahmed Mohamed Adam observes that "Everyone believes that NBI has influenced this. Now, the number of female engineers by far exceeds the number of male engineers."
- In Tanzania, a gender mainstreaming action plan for the ministry was prepared with support from the NBI. Dimosso Oscar Mmba, who is the Mara Basin Water Officer for the Tanzanian Government, states: "This has contributed to ensuring gender-sensitive interventions and equal chances for women and men in preparation and implementation of development projects."

## Leaving no-one behind

The outcomes of this focus on gender issues are important. NBI is making sure that women cannot be left out of the picture of development benefits arising from the emerging projects. The NBI has helped to:

- **Put women firmly in the picture.** Women have equal opportunities in leading and contributing to planning in all areas of NBI work, including the development and management of projects prepared for investment.
- **Ensure equitable benefits from investment projects.** Women are not disproportionately negatively affected and development benefits are meaningful for everyone, including women.
- **Build women's resilience.** The activities to build equal opportunity for women at the community level in water resource projects is also helping them build resilience more broadly, for example to climate change impacts such as flooding and droughts.
- **Promote supportive policy.** By helping countries to mainstream gender issues at the policy level, an enabling environment for equality is being built.

There are challenges to maintaining this momentum - in terms of resourcing, capacity, and social norms - and efforts need continued investment.

This note forms one of a series of briefing notes prepared to mark the completion of the Nile Basin Trust Fund (NBTF). The Nile Basin Trust Fund was opened in 2003 at the request of Ministers responsible for water affairs in the Nile countries, and was administered by the World Bank on behalf of ten donors.

The series of briefing notes highlight the achievements of the Nile Program, a set of projects and sub-programs that have been supported by Nile riparian countries, the Nile Basin Trust Fund and other donors in parallel to the NBTF, largely implemented by the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI).

## NBI Member States



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