

LEARNING NOTE:



# Reflections on Strengthening Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) in Disaster Risk Management

## 01 Introduction

This learning note reflects on BRE-TA's experience of integrating gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) in its work to strengthen disaster risk management (DRM)

systems in Ethiopia. It identifies a number of lessons and opportunities on which future programmes in this space can build.

## Key messages:

1

While substantive policy, legal, or institutional reform is difficult to achieve within the lifespan of a single programme, incremental changes in the practices of government partners are certainly possible and were witnessed by BRE-TA.

2

Both the levelling tool developed by the Ministry of Women and Social Affairs (MOWSA) and the Ministry of Finance's work on gender-responsive budgeting offer existing government mechanisms for monitoring progress with respect to GESI. Future work in this area should build on these mechanisms and also institutionalise the GESI community of practice.

3

Education and advocacy, using internal champions or intra-governmental mechanisms, can help stimulate the appetite for GESI reforms within government bodies. An example from BRE-TA's work in Ethiopia is the recently created GESI community of practice.

## 02

### Background to BRE-TA's work on GESI

BRE-TA's objective was to support the Government of Ethiopia to lead and deliver an effective, more self-financed and accountable response to climate and humanitarian shocks. An important part of that was to integrate within DRM policy and practice a deeper understanding of how patterns of discrimination and inequality build up in society. The programme's approach was to work on conflict sensitivity and GESI together, in recognition of the link between social exclusion and violent conflict. A Conflict Sensitivity (CS) Advisor was temporarily engaged to support a new role within BRE-TA of a full-time GESI Manager to develop together a CS/GESI strategy that would guide BRE-TA interventions in an increasingly conflict-affected environment.<sup>1</sup> However, due to the sensitivities associated with discussing (violent) conflict in Ethiopia, the programme's primary focus with its government partners

was on GESI, which is therefore also the focus of this learning note.

In Ethiopia, most women control fewer political and economic resources than men, including land, employment, and traditional positions of authority;<sup>2</sup> and as is well known '**Natural hazards, such as floods, droughts and earthquakes, are gender neutral - but their impacts are not**'.<sup>3</sup> Acknowledging these gender inequalities and incorporating them into its DRM system-strengthening activities was extremely important for BRE-TA but also very challenging. Not least because unequal power relations do not fall only along gender lines but also intersect with ethnicity, race, religion, age, disability, socioeconomic status, and geographic location. Nevertheless, the intersection of gender with other axes of marginalisation means that women are more likely to experience multiple layers of discrimination.<sup>4</sup>

1 The violence that erupted in northern Ethiopia in November 2020 added a sense of urgency to this work, highlighting the need for BRE-TA to navigate a complex and politically fraught context with care while ensuring that its technical support to the government did no harm.

2 Developing Country Studies, Vol.9, No.11, 2019 Impact of Gender Inequality in Socio-Economic Development: The Case of Women in Ethiopia, Tsegamariam Dula, Wolkite University, College of Agriculture and Natural Resource Management, Department of Agricultural Economics.

3 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disasterriskmanagement/publication/gender-dynamics-of-disaster-risk-and-resilience>

## BOX 1: The gendered impacts of shocks

Gender refers to socially constructed roles and socially learned behaviours and expectations associated with females and males. Gender differences and relations between women and men and girls and boys vary across cultures, geographies, and time. They determine the relative power of women, men, girls, and boys and their respective ability to access and control resources. *Gender dynamics shape both the impacts of disasters and the capacity of different groups in society to withstand them and recover.* Therefore, DRM policies and interventions must understand and take account of these processes in order to close the gender gap in disaster outcomes.<sup>5</sup> At a minimum, DRM interventions should not exacerbate existing power differentials and social inequalities in access to resources and opportunities, but BRE-TA wanted to support government in *'good disaster risk management [which] should consider ways in which gender dynamics influence disaster impacts in any given area before making decisions on policy or project design'*.<sup>6</sup>

## 03 Implementation approach to GESI in DRM system-strengthening

BRE-TA was implemented between March 2019 and March 2024 and structured in four workstreams, each with their own theory of change. Each workstream partnered with a particular set of government institutions and provided them with demand-driven support to improve, strengthen, and reform their DRM systems (Table 1).

**BRE-TA's approach to GESI had two strands:**

- 1. Strengthening the knowledge and capacity of Technical Assistance (TA) specialists and reform champions in areas of conflict sensitivity, gender equality and social inclusion (CS/GESI).** This entailed building the capacity of both BRE-TA and government staff in relevant ministries

to understand CS/GESI conceptual frameworks and identify measures to inform and reform policy and practice in line with these principles.

- 2. Integrating and mainstreaming GESI into DRM system reforms.** BRE-TA's support to the EDRMC in mainstreaming DRM across government provided opportunities to work collaboratively with relevant ministries on CS/GESI mainstreaming.<sup>7</sup> Significantly, there were also inter-governmental initiatives that were opportunities to draw on learning from one sector to another, harness collective wisdom and insights, and harmonise efforts towards sustainable GESI reform.

4 Ibid.

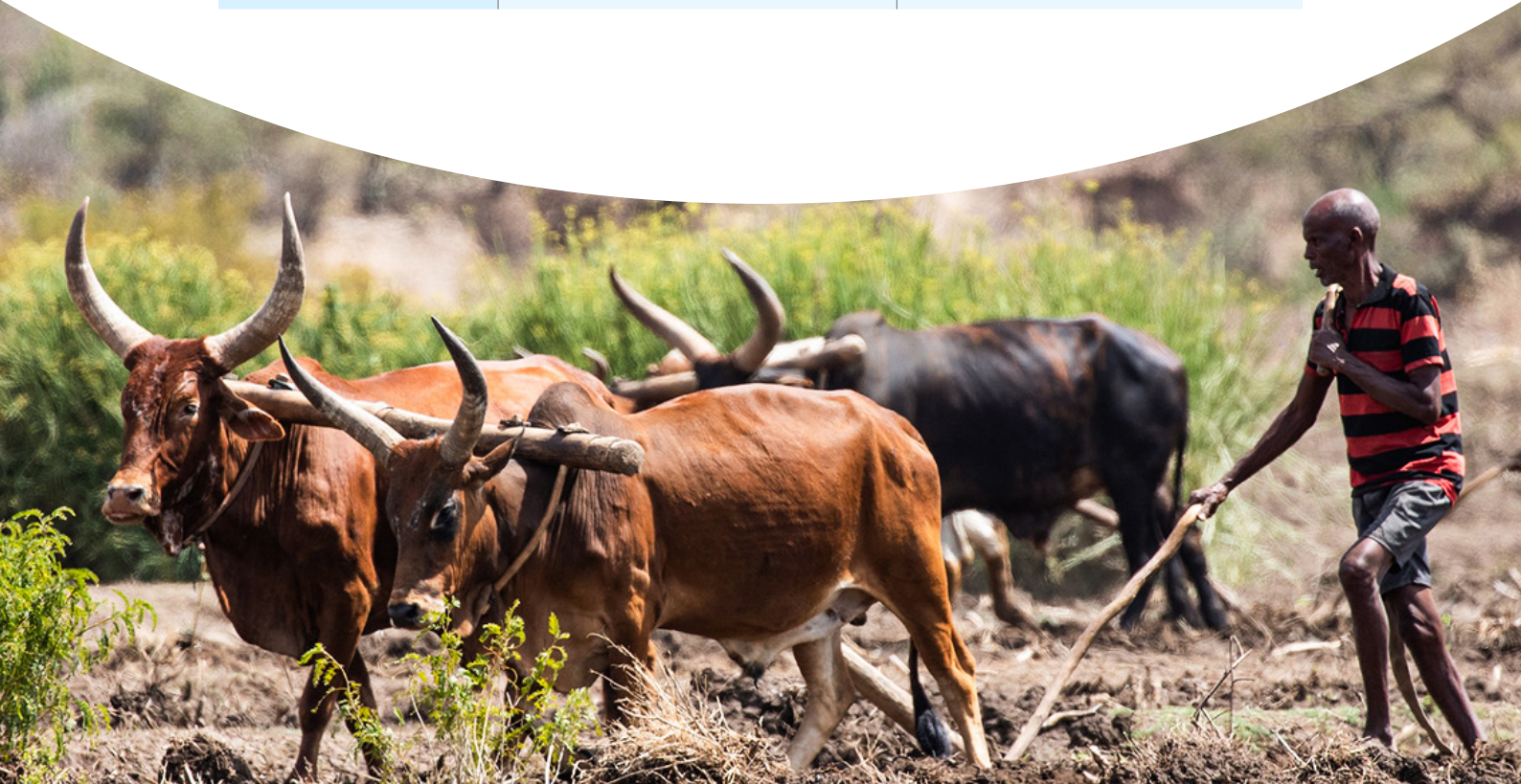
5 Erman et al. (2021) 'Gender Dimensions of Disaster Risk and Resilience'. GFDRR / World Bank Group <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disasterriskmanagement/publication/gender-dynamics-of-disaster-risk-and-resilience>. See also: Fruttero et al. (2023), 'Gendered Impacts of Climate Change - Evidence from Weather Shocks'. World Bank Group, Policy Research Working Paper 10442 <https://wrds.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-07/WB-gendered-impacts-climate-change.pdf>

6 <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/disasterriskmanagement/publication/gender-dynamics-of-disaster-risk-and-resilience>

7 They included the MoF, MoH, EPHI, MoA (Food Security Coordination Office), EDRMC, and their respective regional offices and bureaus.

Table 1: BRE-TA workstreams

Workstream	Principal partners	Focus
Disaster Risk Management (DRM)	Ethiopia Disaster Risk Management Commission (EDRMC) Planning and Development Commission (PDC)	Refining and strengthening the DRM system, particularly coordination mechanisms and mainstreaming.
Shock-Responsive Safety Net (SRSN)	Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) (Productive Safety Net Programme - PSNP) EDRMC (Humanitarian Food Assistance) EDRMC (Humanitarian Food Assistance) Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (Urban PSNP)	Improving shock-responsive social protection by strengthening SRSN coordination and delivery systems, tailored to the needs of different geographies (rural/urban).
Public Health Emergency Management (PHEM)	Ethiopian Public Health Institute (EPHI) Ministry of Health (MoH)	Supporting shock-responsive health systems to deal with public health emergencies through decentralised and multisectoral structures.
Disaster Risk Finance (DRF)	Ministry of Finance	Improving government budgeting and financial mechanisms so that public finances are more resilient to climate and humanitarian shocks.



The starting point of BRE-TA's approach was to consider the interventions it was already supporting and identify how GESI

considerations could be integrated at different stages of the project cycle, using the framework right below.

## GESI Considerations through the Programme Cycle



## 04 Overview of GESI support

BRE-TA's GESI support focused on three areas:



Capacity Building



Intra-governmental Collaboration  
and Coordination



Monitoring, Evaluation,  
and Learning.

### 4.1 Capacity building

BRE-TA's priority was to meet the strong demand from its partners for guidance and support on how to mainstream GESI in DRM, which aligned well with BRE-TA's overall demand-driven approach. The CS/GESI advisors trained BRE-TA and government staff to help them identify gaps in their knowledge and build the skills to mainstream GESI across DRM policy and practice. Training exercises and workshops on applying GESI principles in disaster situations were provided to selected, relevant personnel and incorporated into workstream-specific capacity-building efforts. Since the first training on GESI in October 2021, BRE-TA conducted five GESI training events for a total of 131 participants (78 men and 53 women). To build on an overwhelming demand for greater GESI knowledge from

government partners BRE-TA helped integrated GESI into the core trainings offered by the workstreams.<sup>8</sup>

The cross-cutting GESI team developed a comprehensive CS/GESI guide and tools to support these capacity building efforts, which government entities and BRE-TA staff used to integrate CS/GESI considerations in their work. The team also worked with the gender directorates of partner ministries and uncovered significant demand for further support, including with training needs assessments and the evaluations of policies and practice, the findings from which would help extend the application of GESI principles across government.

### 4.2 Intra-governmental collaboration and coordination

There were two mutually supportive elements to this work, which took place across ministries and different levels of government (federal, regional, and zonal):

**1. Working with the gender directorates** in various line ministries to apply GESI principles to their DRM work, as well as supporting a community of practice to

improve communication and collaboration between them (point 4.3).

**2. Involving MOWSA in GESI and DRM capacity-building workshops.** This helped them roll out their 'levelling tool' – a mechanism the ministry uses to rank and rate Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) across a 'gender continuum', as

<sup>8</sup> For an example of this in the PHEM workstream, please see: <https://www.rebuildconsortium.com/public-health-emergency-management/>

'gender blind', 'sensitive', 'responsive' or 'transformative'. These rankings prompted MDAs to undertake deeper self-evaluation to

identify areas needing improvement within their organisations, which BRE-TA could then support.

### 4.3 Monitoring, evaluation and learning

The GESI Technical Community of Practice, supported by BRE-TA, provides a space for federal and regional line ministries with DRM roles and responsibilities (such as the EDRMC, MOF, MOA, MOH/EPHI and MOWSA) to interact, exchange documents, seek assistance, and mutually monitor progress on GESI. It is a virtual platform, led by MOWSA and EDRMC. Its 22 members held their first session on 3rd January 2024,

organised around a presentation by the gender directorate of the Oromia Regional Health Bureau on the management of gender-based violence during disasters. By working in-step with government to help them set-up a Community of Practice that has minimal costs, as it operates as a virtual support network, it is expected to continue beyond the life of BRE-TA and provide a platform for collaboration and knowledge-sharing on GESI.

## 05

### What did we learn from promoting GESI in DRM system-strengthening interventions?

These lessons are organised around the three areas of activity in section 4:



Capacity Building



Intra-governmental Collaboration  
and Coordination



Monitoring, Evaluation,  
and Learning.

### 5.1 Capacity building

- 1. Official policy commitments on gender** can be leveraged to drive forward work on GESI and respond to the high demand within government for capacity support on this issue<sup>9</sup>.
- 2. All levels of government suffer from high turnover of staff so GESI training will have more impact if it is done in a sustainable**

**and systematic way through government,** with regular sessions, periodic needs assessments, and mandatory courses for new staff, and if it targets all levels of government (federal to woreda) in a coherent way.

<sup>9</sup> For example: the 1995 Constitution; the National Policy on Women (1993); and various policies, proclamations, laws, and regulations to ensure gender equality in economic, political, social, and other aspects of women's lives.

## 5.2 Intra-governmental collaboration and coordination

1. **Build from what is already in place in government.** All line ministries have gender directorates, which have clear mandates. BRE-TA found them to be ready and committed partners to advance GESI policies and practices for DRM.
2. **Make best use of existing entry points.** The work on GESI was a natural extension of, and could therefore easily be aligned with, the support already being given to the government through the BRE-TA workstreams
3. **New entry points will emerge and create new opportunities to engage.** For example, BRE-TA did not have a formal working relationship with MOWSA at the start, but the increased priority attached to CS/GESI created an entry point to work with a new actor in this space. MOWSA is now taking a leadership role, such as chairing the community of practice.
4. **Demand for reform on a cross-cutting issue such as GESI must come from within each ministry / government body.** The reform process in each institution can be supported by a third party such as MOWSA, or a donor funded project, but the appetite must come from within.

## 5.3 Monitoring, evaluation, and learning

1. **MOWSA's levelling tool proved to be a very valuable instrument for engaging line ministries in the importance of monitoring what they need to manage.** Using the tool together in training was a good way to discuss the changes needed to improve their assessment scores. However, further steps are required to ensure that ministries take action to deliver these improvements.
2. **Government-wide accountability and advocacy platforms require internal effort and resources to succeed,** underscoring the importance of strengthening understanding of GESI within the MoF. Gender-responsive budgeting, led by the MoF, proved to be another valuable mechanism through which to highlight the importance of GESI.





## 06

## Going forward, what are the opportunities and challenges for engaging women and socially marginalised groups in DRM planning and delivery systems?

### Opportunities



**Diverse perspectives:** Involving women and socially marginalised groups in DRM planning and delivery systems yields valuable diverse perspectives. Their direct experience of disasters gives crucial insights into local vulnerabilities and resilience strategies. Appreciation of this diversity can lead to more comprehensive risk assessments, deeper understanding of coping mechanisms and risk reduction practices, and potentially more innovative response. Overall, engaging marginalised groups can result in more targeted interventions that address the specific vulnerabilities they face (such as gender-based violence) and enhance community resilience.



**Social cohesion and ownership can improve policy implementation:** Closer engagement with women and socially marginalised groups in DRM

planning and delivery fosters social cohesion, a sense of ownership, and broader community trust. Different groups have different insights from their lived experiences which might be overlooked by a narrow or homogenous planning approach. A risk assessment or response plan that is more tailored to these diverse needs is more likely to foster collaboration and ownership. When individuals or groups see their voices represented, it instils a sense of ownership that encourages active participation and a commitment to more effective implementation of DRM plans.



**Empowerment:** Involving women and marginalised groups in DRM planning and delivery can empower them by giving a voice in decision-making processes, thereby helping to improve gender equality and foster social justice.

### Challenges



**Societal norms and power imbalances:** Deep-seated societal norms shape the participation of women and marginalised groups in DRM. For example, gender norms may confine women to domestic caregiving roles during disasters. As a result, they are less well represented

in DRM decision-making bodies at all levels, and therefore have less power and less opportunity to influence policies and interventions. There may also be situations where certain groups, particularly women and girls, face safety and security concerns when participating in DRM activities.



**Access to resources:** Language barriers, illiteracy, and limited access to technology can make it challenging for some groups (such as internally displaced people, ethnic minorities, or refugees) to access, understand, and contribute to DRM. In societies where gender roles are sharply defined, there may be circumstances where women (or other marginalised groups) would benefit from additional skills and knowledge before they can participate effectively in DRM planning and implementation processes.

To address these challenges and capitalise on the opportunities, it is essential to adopt a more inclusive approach to DRM. This should promote gender equality, social inclusion, and community empowerment. It may involve targeted capacity-building initiatives, policy reforms, community awareness campaigns, and efforts to challenge discriminatory norms and practices. Collaborative efforts involving government agencies, civil society organisations, and affected communities are crucial for making DRM planning and delivery systems more inclusive and effective.

## 07

### What approaches and combinations of approaches should feature prominently in future GESI support to DRM system-strengthening at the regional level?

It is important to recognise that DRM planning and delivery systems in Ethiopia are not one-size-fits-all. They vary significantly based on regional contexts and specific risks. Therefore, the approaches and combinations of approaches that prove effective will also vary. This underscores the significance of context analysis and stakeholder mapping (as highlighted in BRE-TA's CS/GESI guide to staff). The following reform initiatives supported by BRE-TA could be extended and contextualised at the regional level to maximise the positive effects of integrating GESI within DRM planning and delivery systems.

- 1. Vulnerability, Risk and Assessment Mapping and Emergency Preparedness and Response Planning (VRAM-EPRP):** This involves identifying and mapping

hazards and vulnerabilities within the regional public health authorities. It helps with understanding potential risks and vulnerabilities, and assessing capacities and coping mechanisms.<sup>10</sup>

- 2. Early warning systems:** Robust early warning systems deliver timely alerts and information to communities at risk. It is crucial that these systems disaggregate information by factors such as sex, age, and other social determinants.
- 3. Community engagement:** Promoting community participation and empowerment that focuses on the inclusion of women and marginalised groups is paramount in effective DRM planning and decision-making. As an

<sup>10</sup> See work done under BRE-TA's Public Health Emergency Management (PHEM) workstream on Vulnerability Risk and Assessment Mapping – Emergency Preparedness and Response Planning. <https://www.rebuildconsortium.com/public-health-emergency-management/>



illustration: the PSNP Kebele Appeals Committee comprises representatives from diverse groups and helps contextualise wealth indices, target support, and address grievances, including gender-based violence.

- 4. Institutional capacity building:** Strengthening the GESI capacity of regional and local government agencies responsible for DRM is vital. For example, integrating climate change adaptation strategies into existing regional and woreda-level planning initiatives is key to addressing the long-term risks to women and socially marginalised groups.
- 5. Knowledge sharing as a means of capacity development:** Facilitating peer learning and knowledge exchange between regions facing similar disaster risks is an effective

way to ensure that best practices are integrated into DRM strategies.

- 6. Cross-sectoral collaboration to mainstream GESI-responsive DRM:** Collaboration across various sectors and regional bureaus, including health, education, agriculture, defence, women and social affairs and transportation, is critical for achieving comprehensive GESI-sensitive disaster preparedness and response.

Between March 2019 and March 2024 OPM implemented the 'Building Resilience in Ethiopia – Technical Assistance' (BRE-TA) project, funded by FCDO and USAID, to support the Government of Ethiopia (GoE) to deliver a more effective, self-financed and accountable response to humanitarian and climate shocks.



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**For more information,**

Ed Humphrey, Practice Lead, Climate, Resilience, and Sustainability,

✉ [ed.humphrey@opml.co.uk](mailto:ed.humphrey@opml.co.uk)

or visit our website [www.opml.co.uk](http://www.opml.co.uk)

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