

# Gender Equality and the Sustainability of the World's Wetlands

Empowering women to serve as influential agents of change in the wise use and conservation of wetlands is imperative to the sustainability of these precious ecosystems.

Women are vital to the future of the world's wetlands. Their distinct roles and experiences within societies across the globe supply women with unique knowledge and valuable perspectives on these all-too-rapidly disappearing ecosystems. In many regions, for example, women manage resources for their families — including water, food and sources of fuel — which

often gives them a deeper understanding and relationship with the environment, and more extensive knowledge of biodiversity. By fully including both women and men in the effort to protect the planet's wetlands, we benefit more fully from the comprehensive knowledge, talents and potential of all people to solve a global problem that threatens everyone.



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# A gender-responsive approach to sustainable wetland conservation

Equal involvement of women and men in decision-making in all matters is central to achieving an effective gender-responsive approach to the wise use, management and conservation of wetlands. Importantly, it helps ensure that efforts address the differential needs of both women and men, and that the distribution of benefits, resources, status and rights is equitable. The four guiding principles delineated below can help in applying a gender-responsive approach to sustainable wetland conservation at the national level:

1. People-centred governance that respects women and those living in margins of development through full access and control of valuable assets, including land ownership, rights and economic autonomy.
2. Equal access to and control of natural resources so women can manage and protect their livelihoods.
3. Recognition of women as decision-makers and leaders, enabling their participation in decision-making processes at all levels in the wise use and conservation of wetlands.
4. Comprehensive sex-disaggregated data collection, awareness-raising, equitable decision-making and inclusive engagement of all stakeholders.

## How factoring in gender affects outcomes

NEGATIVE Consequences When NOT Factored In	POSITIVE Consequences When Factored In
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jeopardize project/programme efficiency and sustainability by failing to understand the whole picture.</li> <li>• Misidentify stakeholders in wetland conservation efforts.</li> <li>• Exacerbate gender inequalities, including an increased workload for women without proper compensation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater resilience and capacity for adaptation to changes in wetland ecosystems.</li> <li>• More favourable project/programme outcomes — as they leverage the knowledge and capacity of both women and men, and effectively respond to their different needs.</li> <li>• Greater awareness of the roles, experiences and importance of both women and men to better address their needs and priorities.</li> </ul>

## Areas of opportunity for mainstreaming gender equality efforts

Mainstreaming gender equality efforts into *all* wetland initiatives means fully integrating gender perspective into *all* wetland policies, programmes, discussions and planning so the concerns and experiences of both women and men are addressed, and so both women and men can contribute and benefit equally. Below are entry points for starting such mainstreaming efforts:

1. **National**
  - Acquire the knowledge and skills needed to apply a gender-responsive approach to all wetland activities at the national level.
  - Better integrate gender considerations in the reporting of wetland data and activities within individual countries at the national level and to the Convention.
2. **Governance**
  - Advance the gender-balance goal and improve women's participation at the national level, in Convention negotiations and in their representation within Constituted Bodies.
  - Strengthen the organization's capacity to mainstream gender equality efforts.
  - Make gender considerations more consistent and methodical within the work of the Convention.
3. **Knowledge management and enhanced competencies**
  - Improve and increase knowledge sharing and communication.
  - Develop greater skills and competencies necessary for the advancement of gender equality.
4. **Synergies**
  - Improve collaboration and synergies with UN agencies toward the advancement of gender equality in wetland conservation efforts, ensuring consistency with the SDGs.

# A checklist of eight golden rules for mainstreaming gender equality in all wetland initiatives

1. Structure inclusive and gender-sensitive project teams with capacities and technical expertise to support gender-responsive action.
2. Include existing national gender policies in all initiatives.
3. Ensure that women and women's organizations are represented in any stakeholder consultation.
4. Conduct gender analysis and advance comprehensive sex-disaggregated data collection.
5. Promote equal rights to access and derive benefits from the use, management and conservation of wetlands.
6. Support the full, equal and effective engagement of women and men in decision-making and in all actions related to developing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating initiatives and projects.
7. Provide adequate resources — both expertise and financial — to support the development and implementation of gender-responsive interventions, policies and programmes.
8. Ensure that the results' frameworks are gender responsive.

## Applying Sustainable Development Goal 5 to wetland initiatives

Underpinning the effort to mainstream gender equality is the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Specifically, Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 — “Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls” — recognizes that by providing women and girls with equal access to education, health care, decent work and representation in political and economic decision-making processes, we will bring about sustainable economies and

benefit societies and humanity at large. Notably, gender equality is critical to achieving all SDGs. Relative to wetlands specifically, women have different access to and control over natural resources and information about how conservation and wise use shapes the way in which wetlands are managed, affecting their rights and customary uses of wetland products and services.

### SEVEN TERMS TO KNOW

<b>Gender:</b>	The roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society at a given time considers appropriate for men and women, but not because of anatomic or physiological differences.
<b>Gender dynamics:</b>	The relationships and interactions among people based on gender that are informed by sociocultural constructions and power relationships.
<b>Gender equality:</b>	The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys; gender inequalities are rooted in legal and social norms — including unequal access to education, economic opportunities and decision-making, and other social factors, such as age, wealth and ethnicity, which dictate if and how women and men access, use and control wetlands.
<b>Gender mainstreaming:</b>	Intended to stem inequality, it comprehensively integrates gender perspective into the mainstream of society and social and economic development by assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action — including legislation, policies and programs — in any area and at all levels. It ensures that the concerns and experiences of both women and men are integral to the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so women and men benefit equally.
<b>Gender-responsive approach:</b>	A method of problem solving that ensures that women and men's differential needs are addressed; that participation of women and men is equitable; and that distribution of benefits, resources, status and rights are equitably addressed.
<b>Gender empowerment:</b>	A process of ongoing change through which women and girls expand their aspirations, strengthen their voice and exercise more choice.
<b>Gender balance:</b>	The ratio of men and women in any given situation, achieved when there is approximately an equal number of women and men present or participating.
<b>Gender sensitive:</b>	Understanding and considering sociocultural factors underlying sex-based discrimination.

# What others have done to mainstream gender equity: a case study

Isla de Chira in Costa Rica's Gulf of Nicoya is an inspiring example of how women became directly engaged and developed a sense of ownership of their community's forests. Three communities worked to restore the surrounding mangrove habitat, with mainly women participating in mangrove-restoration projects, initiating propagule nurseries, reforesting degraded areas, and cleaning and maintaining established mangrove sites. Previously, much of the gulf mangroves had been deforested for firewood and converted to salt evaporation areas and shrimp ponds — with the mangrove degradation negatively affecting household incomes. Consequently, women — who traditionally extracted mollusks from mangrove forests for subsistence and income — mobilized. Not only did they participate in mangrove forest monitoring and restoration, but they played a key role in organizing education opportunities and forest management.

Specifically:

- Women were able to communicate their needs and expertise, making up 67.8% of local participation in establishing the mangrove-management plan.
- The input of women — both mollusk harvesters and mangrove re-foresters — was included during the zoning process.
- Concerns among local women about gendered home roles and how dwindling mollusk populations would affect their livelihood cemented their interest in mangrove conservation and wise use. Those who participated in mangrove restoration training and projects felt empowered. They now could communicate their new expertise to visitors and tourists, and some even gained meaningful alternatives for supporting themselves.

## Key resources

[Guidance on Mainstreaming Gender Under the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands](#)

[Resolution XIII.18: Gender and Wetlands](#)

[Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women \(CEDAW\)](#)

[Training Webinar: Mainstreaming Gender Under the Convention on Wetlands](#)