

The SEI Gender and Social Equity Programme

There are vital interconnections between gender, social equity, environment and development. Environmental change can affect different social groups in different ways: women and men, rich and poor, specific ethnic and age groups, people in developed and developing countries.

Patterns of development and economic growth that neglect the needs of specific groups of people can exacerbate disparities, stratifying people into losers and winners, worsening living conditions and creating unjust outcomes. A deliberate focus on gender and social equity in development can help achieve more inclusive benefits, and enhance human and environmental well-being.

SEI has long engaged with these issues in its research, but often not in a focused, sustained and explicit manner. This programme aims to enhance SEI’s capacity to engage in research and policy with a view to transforming gender, social and power relations to ensure more equitable outcomes.

Our starting point is that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, amplified by disparate distribution of decision-making power, are putting enormous pressure on natural resources and also worsening poverty and inequality, with particularly serious impacts on people who depend on natural resources for their livelihoods and survival.

The Programme’s core objective is to address knowledge and policy gaps related to gender and social equity in order to inform and advance sustainable development policy. The work packages and activities focus on three main tasks:

1. Mainstreaming gender and social equity issues within SEI’s projects, themes, initiatives and operations, including model-based policy analysis, to strengthen SEI’s internal capacity for gender- and equity-sensitive research for policy wherever possible;
2. Providing opportunities for new research projects with a gender and social equity lens; and
3. Consolidating findings and insights in order to communicate them to relevant stakeholders, boundary partners and change agents to enable solutions for empowerment and transformative governance.



Village discussion on gender roles in Knat commune, Siem Reap, Cambodia.

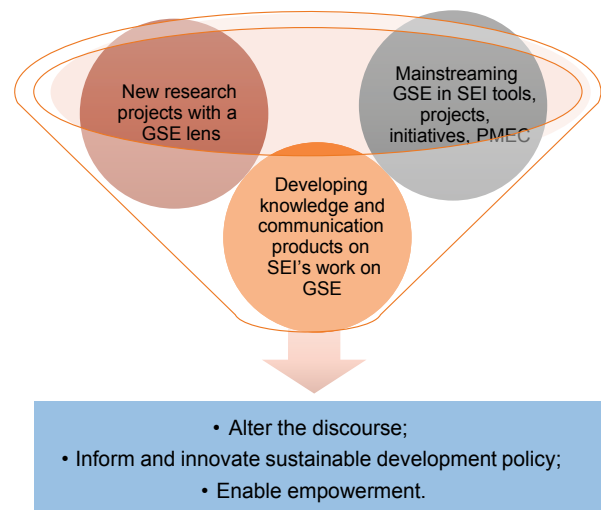


Figure 1: The structure of the SEI Gender and Social Equity Programme.

As shown in Figure 1, the Programme’s three functions are closely integrated. New research projects will inform and in turn reflect the approaches and procedures developed for mainstreaming gender and social equity in SEI research and methods. Communications and knowledge-sharing will be built into all activities, to foster dialogue within SEI and with our boundary partners, and to ensure that our work reaches and is relevant to policy-makers and other stakeholders.

Gender, social equity and power

Societies around the world are grappling with climate change, disasters, environmental degradation, resource scarcity and poverty. At the same time, in many places, people face discrimination and even violence because they are women, poor, ethnic or religious minorities, gays and lesbians, people with disabilities. These two sets of issues may seem unrelated, but in fact, they are interlinked.

Research since the 1980s has shown clear disparities in different population groups’ access to livelihood resources, and in their vulnerability to climate change and environmental degradation. These disparities are mediated by social, economic and political institutions with often tacit gender and social norms that create and sustain inequality – both within societies, and between them.

If we want to understand and address today’s development and environmental challenges, we need to examine people and ecosystems in relation to each other. This Programme focuses on *gender* – the roles, traits and expectations assigned to each sex – and how they translate into unequal control over and access to resources and often into poverty, disadvantage and vulnerability. We also apply a *social equity* lens, which goes beyond ensuring equal opportunities to demand fairness of outcomes for men and women and people of different classes, races, ethnicities, nationalities, etc.

A third key aspect of our work is to examine *power* relations: not just power *over* people, resources and institutions, but also “power to” act, and people’s “power with” one another or with

institutions to effect change in their lives, as well as the power that comes from assigning special authority to particular forms of knowledge over others.

Gender and social equity issues arise across much of SEI's work. This Programme aims to help SEI staff to better recognize these issues and to dive deeper into them.

Work package 1: Developing new research projects

The Programme is supporting three scoping studies that explore gaps in knowledge and policy related to gender and social equity. All three projects focus on the drivers and conditions of disadvantage, and explore potential and pathways for sustainability and empowerment.

Social and gender factors in SMEs' sustainability agendas

Small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) are key economic actors across developing and developed countries. SEI is seeking to understand how SMEs are greening their businesses, and how gender and social equity might be integrated into their models of sustainable business. The project is working with SMEs in GreenEcoNet, a platform that SEI's York Centre developed to support SMEs transitioning towards a green economy. The goal is to support SMEs to ensure that "greening" economic initiatives are inclusive and equitable.

The gender pay gap in Estonia's agriculture and forestry sectors

Estonia has one of the largest gender pay gaps in the EU (30%). With employment in bioeconomy sectors such as agriculture and forestry expected to grow, SEI Tallinn is studying the implications for women's employment and wages in the future, especially as more men are educated in and employed by these sectors. Project activities include a stakeholder workshop to discuss the reasons for the wage gap and ways to narrow it, and a report with policy recommendations.

Modelling gender-sensitive sustainability pathways

SEI is designing research tools to analyse the marginalization and exclusion of groups of women and men in the course of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The project uses agent-based modelling to simulate different sustainability pathways, and examines the outcomes for women and men who have differential access to resources and power, focusing on food production and women's access to resources. The long-term goal of this work is to help transform SDG monitoring for greater inclusivity and equity.

Work package 2: Mainstreaming gender and social equity into modelling

SEI has developed a number of modelling tools that are widely used for research and policy analysis for sustainable water resource planning, energy planning, and ecological footprinting, among other areas. Despite their highly technical nature, these tools can be applied in ways that enable social inclusion, and that produce insights on how power is created and transformed.

This work package focuses on adapting and developing SEI's modelling and technical support services to more effectively incorporate gender and social equity issues. This involves reviewing the design of the tools themselves, such as WEAP, the Water Evaluation and Planning system, and LEAP, the Long-range Energy Alternatives Planning system. We will

To learn more about the Programme and its latest activities and publications, see:

<https://www.sei-international.org/gender-social-equity>.

also examine how SEI selects and designs projects, provides technical support, builds capacity, and engages with decision-making processes. The result will be guidance materials for mainstreaming gender and social equity perspectives in SEI model-based policy analysis.

Work package 3: Aligning gender and social equity issues with SEI research

SEI is also working to mainstream gender and social equity across SEI's research and practices. We are carrying out a comprehensive assessment of gender-related knowledge, results and impact/outcomes from SEI research, as well as personnel expertise, as a starting point for the development of a gender and social equity strategy. A guidance document will facilitate the incorporation of gender and social equity into initiatives and projects.

In addition, SEI is integrating gender variables into monitoring and evaluation throughout the project cycle, from budgeting and proposal writing, to ensuring gender-sensitive outcomes for our target groups. SEI is also mainstreaming gender and social equity in our operations by exploring empowerment pathways for sustainable change in gender and social relations throughout the institution.

Looking ahead

A number of publications and guidance documents are being produced in the first phase of the Programme. In addition, we are developing several research proposals to build on this work and scale it up, and hope to collaborate with communities of researchers and practice at different scales. Our goal is to create meaningful partnerships premised on a strong ethic that questions the historical relationships that produced hunger, poverty, environmental decline and disasters.

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