Social Development Direct

GEDSI Mainstreaming in practice: Safety, Integrity, and Social Justice

SDDirect on GEDSI Mainstreaming: From Analysis to Lasting Change

Why does GEDSI mainstreaming matter?

For over 25 years, Social Development Direct (SDDirect) has delivered politically smart, context-specific Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) work with donors, UN agencies, governments, and civil society worldwide. From humanitarian crises to large-scale reform, we embed GEDSI into the DNA of policies, systems and programmes.

Mainstreaming GEDSI is essential for sustainable impact and value for money in Official Development Assistance (ODA). It is not an optional extra, not only because of legal and policy commitments, but because it is central to ensuring safety, integrity and social justice:

- **Safety** | Ignoring GEDSI risks creating unsafe environments, particularly for those already marginalised. Centring GEDSI ensures development and humanitarian work does no harm and actively protects people.
- **Integrity** | Programmes that overlook GEDSI risk wasting resources, entrenching exclusion, and losing credibility with communities and partners.
- **Social justice** | GEDSI challenges discriminatory norms, redistributes power, and ensures benefits reach everyone – so that no one is left behind.

At SDDirect, GEDSI is about tackling root causes of inequality, not just surface-level fixes. We promote GEDSI mainstreaming, over gender mainstreaming as doing so recognises that intersecting inequalities compound disadvantages. Intersecting inequalities include universal factors such as ethnicity, disability, and sexuality, as well as context specific factors such as language, dependence on climate-sensitive resources, and social status.

GEDSI at our core

SDDirect places GEDSI at the core of all its work (see figure 1), grounding everything we do in an analysis of structural and systemic inequalities and the way in which they shape power across different contexts and institutions over time. In doing this, we are seeking to address the root causes of perpetual poverty and inequality.
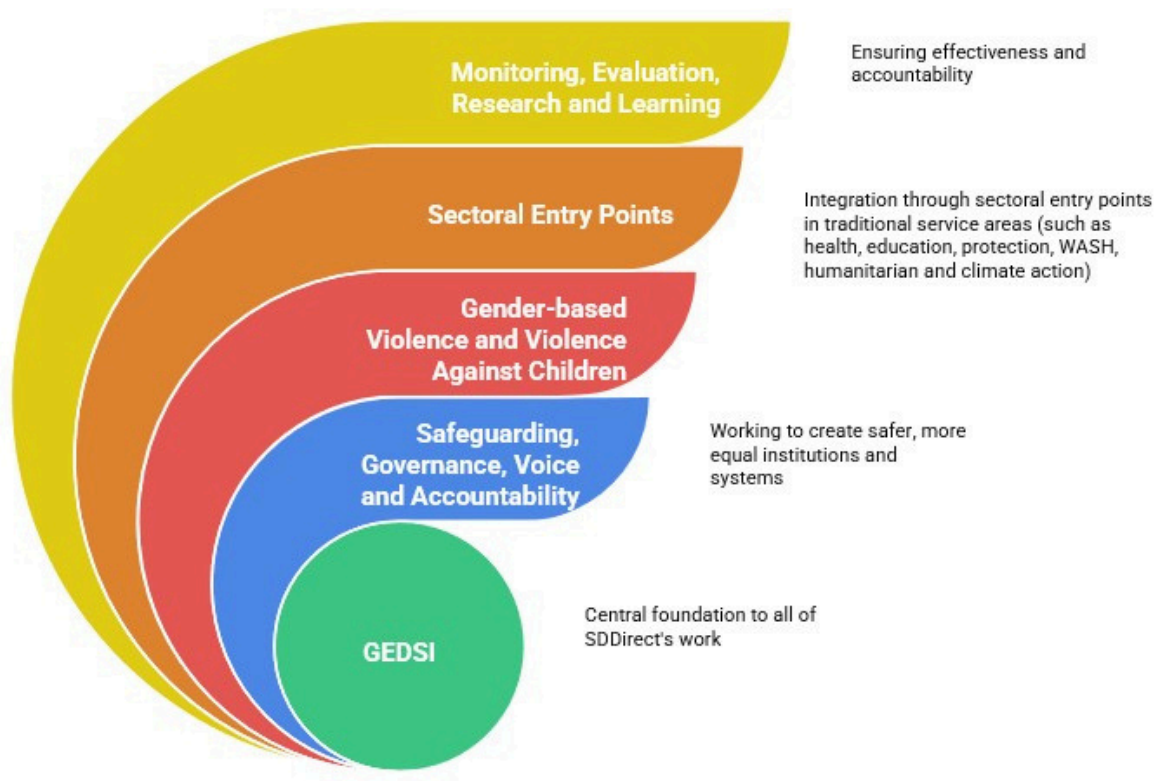

Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning — Ensuring effectiveness and accountability

Sectoral Entry Points — Integration through sectoral entry points in traditional service areas (such as health, education, protection, WASH, humanitarian and climate action)

Gender-based Violence and Violence Against Children

Safeguarding, Governance, Voice and Accountability — Working to create safer, more equal institutions and systems

GEDSI — Central foundation to all of SDDirect's work

Figure 1: GEDSI is at the centre of SDDirect's work

GEDSI mainstreaming in practice

Our approach goes beyond one-off training or skills transfer. We work with partners to strengthen organisations, systems and cultures through long-term accompaniment and mentorship so that inclusive practice outlasts political shifts or staff turnover. This approach aligns with Smart Technical Assistance (Smart TA).

In practice, SDDirect's GEDSI mainstreaming:

- **Builds on strong analysis** – we integrate GEDSI into political economy analysis, humanitarian needs analyses, our Helpdesk delivery, and sector diagnostics to reveal structural inequalities.
- **Targets systems, not individuals** – embedding GEDSI into organisational structures, people, processes and values. We additionally deliver systems change through learning and evaluation work and subsequent recommendations, for example through our evaluation of WHO's Disability Policy or the evaluation of UNICEF's Gender Action Plan and Gender Policy.
- **Works politically** – identifying champions and understanding what enables or blocks change.
- **Focuses on sustainability** – building the long-term capability of partners to lead their own GEDSI agendas.
- **Adapts to context** – recognising that solutions must be locally relevant, sector specific and grounded in lived experience.

GEDSI analysis: The first step to lasting change

GEDSI analysis is about examining how gender, disability, social identity and power shape people's opportunities and risks. Done well, it:

- Identifies structural inequalities and discriminatory norms.
- Pinpoints barriers – environmental, institutional and attitudinal – that prevent equal access.
- Highlights opportunities for transformation, whether through mainstreaming or stand-alone interventions.

At SDDirect, GEDSI analysis is not a one-off exercise. We update it throughout project cycles, using it to test strategies, manage risks, adapt programming, and track impact. Embedding GEDSI into monitoring, evaluation, research and learning (MERL) ensures accountability and genuine system-wide change.

What makes effective GEDSI mainstreaming?

From our experience, five lessons stand out:

- **Think politically** – understand the drivers that keep inequalities in place and identify levers for change.
- **Get the right people and/or partners** – combine technical skill with lived experience, curiosity, and courage to challenge the status quo.
- **Invest in relationships within communities and systems where you wish to see change** – co-create analysis and solutions with those most affected and invest in long-term partnerships that support change agents. This builds ownership and sustains progress.
- **Choose the right approach** – integrate GEDSI into wider work where possible but use stand-alone interventions where urgent rights violations demand it.

- **Keep GEDSI alive throughout the cycle** – link analysis to theories of change, track progress, build GEDSI relevant accountability mechanisms, and adapt delivery so that inclusion is never sidelined.

GEDSI mainstreaming cannot be tokenistic or delivered as a one-off intervention. It is about transforming systems, tackling root causes of inequality, and ensuring development and humanitarian work is safe, credible and just.

SDDirect aims to deliver lasting, inclusive change through our work. For case studies demonstrating ways in which we have mainstreamed GEDSI, **take a look here**. Here, you will find examples of mainstreaming GEDSI into GBV prevention and response programming; in our MERL work; into Women's Economic Empowerment work; within our Governance and Inclusive Societies work; and within our Safeguarding work.

For more information, or to get in touch please contact Kate Bishop, Technical Director, kate.bishop@sddirect.org.uk

Why partner with SDDirect?

- Proven track record – decades of context-specific, politically smart GEDSI delivery.
- Intersectional approach – we never separate gender from wider inclusion; we work across both.
- Cross-sector expertise – education, child protection, health, governance, safeguarding, gender-based violence and more.
- Adaptive delivery – specialists in iterative, problem-driven reform processes.
- Trusted relationships – equitable partnerships with governments, multilaterals and civil society.
- Evidence-driven – robust MERL systems to demonstrate real shifts in inclusion.

[1] For example, Leaving no one behind (LNOB) is the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs and multiple donors have legal commitments to mainstream and advance GEDSI within their funding streams, including the UK through the provisions made within the International Development (Gender Equality) Act (2014), which states: In section 1 (development assistance), after subsection (1): "(1A)Before providing development assistance under subsection (1), the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability of providing development assistance that is likely to contribute to reducing poverty in a way which is likely to contribute to reducing inequality between persons of different gender."
(3)In section 3 (humanitarian assistance), after the existing provision (which becomes subsection (1)): "(2)Before providing assistance under subsection (1), the Secretary of State shall have regard to the desirability of providing assistance under that subsection in a way that takes account of any gender-related differences in the needs of those affected by the disaster or emergency."