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.
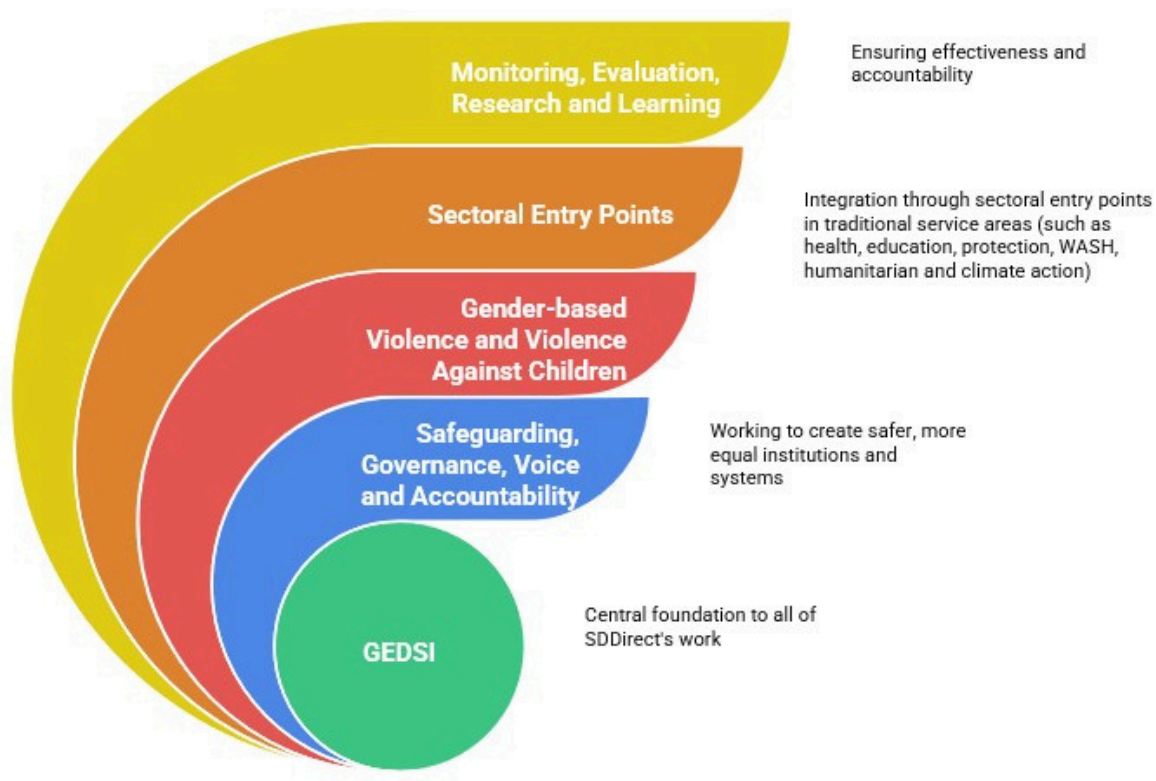


**Monitoring, Evaluation, Research and Learning** — Ensuring effectiveness and accountability

**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.
- **Invest in relationships** – co-create analysis and solutions with those most affected. This builds ownership, reduces risks, and sustains change.

- **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.

# Case Studies

## Case Story | Mainstreaming GEDSI within our Women's Economic Empowerment work

The Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG), a GIF Advisory Partner, encourages and mobilises private sector investment in infrastructure in emerging markets and developing economies (EMDEs) to facilitate economic development. It does this by supporting the development and financing of infrastructure projects that are viable for investment by the private sector and public-private partnerships (PPPs) in infrastructure.

From 2020-21, SDDirect worked in partnership with PIDG to provide GESI expertise with the aim to increase the gender empowerment potential of PIDG investments within the context of a sound business case. Drawing on latest evidence and best practice, the team reviewed five PIDG investment opportunities for GuarantCo and InfraCo Asia in sectors including digital and energy, providing advice on their:

- Gender empowerment potential, reviewing against the PIDG Gender Ambition Framework
- Gender business case, including providing relevant good practice examples
- Implementation plans for the PIDG company/project sponsor based on the business case

## Case Story | Mainstreaming GESI within our MERL work

SDDirect was part of a multidisciplinary consortia delivering the Global Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (GMEL) service for the Conflict, Stability and Security Fund (CSSF). GMEL supported the Joint Funds Unit (JFU) to develop and implement MEL systems and processes that meet the demands of programming in fragile and conflict affected contexts and generates and synthesises evidence for policy and decision-making. SDDirect's role in GMEL was to lead the meaningful integration of GESI across GMEL interventions aimed to strengthen the CSSF fund-wide MEL ecosystem. Amongst other deliverables, SDDirect's GESI leadership resulted in:

- A GESI marker to monitor the fund compliance with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) gender equality policy marker, which supported projects to meaningfully mainstream GESI into their projects and MEL
- Guidance and principles for incorporating GESI in Theories of Change and Results Frameworks
- Guidance to conduct intersectional gender analysis in conflict affected settings
- Safeguarding and GESI principles for CSSF evaluations
- Principles for addressing gender and social bias in data analytics

For more information about our work in the GMEL for CSSF, please see here.

## Case Story | Mainstreaming GEDSI within our work to prevent and respond to Gender-Based Violence

SDDirect takes a fundamentally GEDSI transformative approach to all our work in GBV, recognising that violence is underpinned by power imbalances and gender inequality, and only systemic shifts in who holds power and how it is used will reduce the prevalence of violence against women and girls in all their diversity.

The Malawi Violence Against Women and Girls Prevention and Response, or Tithetse Nkahza! (Let's End Violence!) Programme in Malawi, for which SDDirect was the technical lead, embedded GEDSI throughout the programme. Within the expectation that the programme operate at the transformative end of the GEDSI Responsiveness Continuum with respect to gender equality and women's rights, the programme set itself what it considered a more realistic goal of strategic engagement on all forms of social inclusion, with the aim of adapting to transformative ways of working toward the end of the programme. Tithetze Nkhanza! developed and delivered a GESI strategy, a set of GESI markers, and a range of learning products about embedding GESI transformation, particularly Disability Inclusion, within a GBV programme. Regrettably the programme was closed prematurely due to the UK aid budget cuts in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, so the efforts to reduce the prevalence of violence against women in all their diversity were not rigorously assessed.

The programme design, however, has been scaled up and is being delivered by a consortium of WROs in Malawi with funding from the What Works 2 programme, with a continued focus on reaching women with disabilities. The accompanying randomised control trial is designed to determine whether integration of GEDSI into the programme yields results. More information is available here.

## Case Story | Mainstreaming GEDSI within our Safeguarding work

The Safeguarding Resource and Support Hub (RSH) is an FCDO-funded, global support mechanism for CSOs to strengthen their approaches to addressing SEAH perpetrated by those associated with aid.

In May 2022, RSH launched an Eastern European Hub (RSH EE), funded by the Disasters Emergency Committee. The hub aimed to strengthen the safeguarding of refugees fleeing Ukraine, overwhelmingly women and children by working with CSOs proving support to refugees in Moldova, Poland and Romania. RSH quickly established the need for targeted GEDSI Strategic interventions focussing on disability inclusion, SOGIESC inclusion and Roma inclusion. These groups were strategically targeted due to the demographic profile of the refugees and the political and social history that exacerbated safeguarding risks for people with disabilities, members of the SOGIESC community and members of the Roma community. The Hub looked inward, creating a culture and capabilities within the team to meaningfully deliver on these GEDSI objectives, and contracting specialist expertise. Outwardly, they conducted research on safeguarding risks for people with disabilities and refugees with various sexual and gender identities, developed contextualised resources such as the Disability Inclusion series and the Roma community safeguarding series, and ensured documents and guidance were translated including into Romani and four different sign languages. They also facilitated roundtables to bring organisations together to raise awareness and address the specific safeguarding risks for the SOGIESC community.

Given the relevance of RSH EE's work, over 6,300 resources were downloaded from the website, and 100% of the CSOs engaged by the hub were satisfied with the support provided, while 91% felt that the support was tailored to their needs.

[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."