

Promoting Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion Through Infrastructure

Why it matters

Infrastructure is vital for societal development and economic progress, but benefits are often not distributed equally. Inadequate consideration of [barriers related to gender, disability, and other social factors](#) can result in exclusion and disproportionate impacts on groups affected by marginalisation. Recognising the different ways in which diverse groups of people utilise infrastructure, it is crucial to explicitly incorporate their distinct needs in infrastructure projects. To foster inclusive and fair growth, it is essential to integrate Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) across the entire project cycle. **By addressing the diverse needs of various groups, infrastructure initiatives can effectively drive economic growth, enhance accessibility, and foster sustainable outcomes that benefit everyone.**

Key Statistics



Estimates suggest that some [40 billion hours a year](#) are spent collecting water in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is equivalent to a year of labour for the entire workforce of France. [Eighty percent of water is collected by women](#), and globally, and women spend more than 200 million hours collecting water every day. A survey of 20,000 households in Bangladesh found that [79% of people with disabilities were unable to collect water](#).



In developing countries, lack of access to and safety of transport reduce the probability of women's [participation in the labour force by 16.5%](#).



A lack of water and sanitation facilities undermines economic output of women street vendors in particular, [cutting earnings by up to 20%](#) due to multiple costs – including trips to the toilet and water delivery.

Opportunities

Infrastructure programmes that better incorporate the needs of women and groups affected by marginalisation have the potential to catalyse broad-based benefits for a wider range of citizens. These benefits include:

- Increasing [access to jobs](#) and [entrepreneurship opportunities](#) for women and groups affected by marginalisation through enhanced mobility and accessibility, increased time savings, access to energy, and participation in the design, construction, and maintenance of infrastructure.
- Enhancing safety of women and groups affected by marginalisation, and [tackling gender-based violence and harassment](#), through infrastructure responds to their concerns and creates a safer environment.
- More [sustainable](#) and [effective service delivery](#) by enhancing women's leadership, representation, and employment in the infrastructure industry.

Policy Context

The integration of GESI in infrastructure projects aligns with the policy context set by the UK government. The [FCDO's International Development Strategy](#) commits to 'unlocking the full potential and power of women and girls' as part of accelerating progress on all global priorities, and recognises sustainable infrastructure investments as a key priority. The [International Women and Girls Strategy](#) focuses on women's economic empowerment in trade, infrastructure, agriculture, manufacturing, green sectors, and digitally enabled enterprises.

The UK's [International Development \(Gender Equality\) Act 2014](#) legally requires consideration of gender equality in development and humanitarian spending. FCDO's [Disability Inclusion and Rights Strategy](#) aims for equal access and opportunities for people with disabilities in economic assets, jobs, livelihoods, finance, and infrastructure. These policies are in line with the UK's commitment to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly [Goal 5](#) on Gender Equality, [Goal 1](#) on ending poverty, and [Goal 8](#) on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth. Effective gender equality and social inclusion mainstreaming are crucial for the success of infrastructure programs and overall economic development initiatives.

Key Tips

- **Integrate Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) across the project cycle.** Conduct a comprehensive GEDSI analysis to identify specific needs, challenges, and opportunities related to gender and social inclusion. This analysis should consider the differential impact on girls, women, boys, and men and people of marginalised genders, people with disabilities, and people affected by marginalisation. The analysis should inform project design and implementation strategies. Data should be disaggregated by sex, age, disability, and other relevant characteristics. Mainstream GEDSI considerations in project planning and design by developing a GEDSI Strategy and Gender Action Plan, outlining measures to be taken throughout the project lifecycle, ensuring that ambition is maintained. Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact on gender equality, disability, and social inclusion, collecting disaggregated data to track progress, address challenges, and amplify successful approaches. Transparent and accountable monitoring and evaluation processes ensure sustained commitment to GEDSI in infrastructure programs.
- **Promote Meaningful Participation and Consultation:** Include diverse stakeholders, particularly women, people with disabilities, and groups affected by marginalisation, in decision-making processes and project design. Create platforms for meaningful participation and consultation, including with organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs), throughout all project stages, including planning, design, implementation, and evaluation. Encourage open dialogue and provide adequate resources and support to enable the active engagement of these groups. Ensure the representation of women, people with disabilities, and groups affected by marginalisation in governance structures, planning and decision-making with the use of quotas as appropriate, to feed into project design. These measures help infrastructure projects align with the needs, aspirations, and priorities of women and groups affected by marginalisation.
- **Adopt good practice in design to promote equitable access to Infrastructure:** Promote equal access to infrastructure services by considering the specific needs and challenges faced by different genders and social groups, including people

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with disabilities. Address [barriers that hinder equitable access](#), such as geographical disparities, affordability, and cultural norms. [Tailor infrastructure designs and service delivery mechanisms](#) to meet the diverse needs of users, ensuring that no group is left behind. Examples include ensuring women and groups affected by marginalisation are involved in the planning, design, delivery and operations of infrastructure; tailoring costs and tariffs to promote accessibility; addressing safety concerns; and better equipping institutions through training & capacity building to address the needs of all people. This should also include [accessible design solutions and universal design principles](#), including for older women and people with disabilities. Incorporate inclusive design features related to specific infrastructure being delivered.

- **Build Capacity and Promote Skill Development:** Invest in capacity-building initiatives that empower women and groups affected by marginalisation. This should include providing training and skill development programs aimed at women, people with disabilities, and groups affected by marginalisation to enhance their technical knowledge, decision-making abilities, and entrepreneurship skills, especially in non-traditional sectors such as driving, electrical skills, supervisory as opposed to labourer roles. Gender equality and disability inclusion training should also be provided for government officials, managers, engineers, technical experts and programme staff involved in infrastructure planning and design, resulting in institutional change, and more sustained impact.
- **Use infrastructure development to create employment opportunities for women, people with disabilities, and groups affected by marginalisation:** Infrastructure development can be leveraged to create employment opportunities for women, people with disabilities, and groups affected by marginalisation, by promoting their participation in various roles such as planners, architects, engineers, contractors, and supervisors. This ensures that the built environments reflect the needs of all residents, including girls and women. To achieve this, targeted human resource policies should be implemented to encourage the hiring, retention, and advancement of people affected by marginalisation in municipal authorities or infrastructure providers. Support should also be provided to women in non-traditional or male-dominated infrastructure sectors, such as bus driving, ticket collecting, and taxi driving, which not only generates direct employment but also enhances perceptions of safety. Incentive schemes, including tailored quotas based on socio-economic appraisal, can be designed to encourage contractors to employ women, people with disabilities and groups affected by marginalisation in construction and non-traditional supply chains. Workplace training is also necessary to address attitudinal barriers that women, people with disabilities and other groups affected by marginalisation face.
- **Foster inclusive entrepreneurship:** Encourage the inclusion of local businesses and women-owned enterprises in the supply chain and procurement processes. Provide support for entrepreneurship, access to credit, and business development services to empower these groups economically. Integrate GEDSI objectives into procurement documents, processes, scoring and bid assessment.
- **Ensure Safety and Security:** Address safety and security concerns to create an enabling environment for all individuals to access and utilise infrastructure services without fear of violence or harassment. Identify [safety concerns of women and groups affected by marginalisation](#) such as those from racial or ethnic minorities, diverse sexual orientations, status/identity and people with disabilities, in relation to the infrastructure being proposed as part of GEDSI analysis, baselines, and through engagement with local communities and stakeholders. Incorporate measures such as adequate lighting, surveillance systems, and gender-responsive urban planning to enhance safety and security.

Do Not

- **Think of women & groups affected by marginalisation as simply beneficiaries** – instead find ways to involve women and groups affected by marginalisation in infrastructure projects as leaders, employees, and entrepreneurs.
- **Forget to take an intersectional approach** – include groups affected by marginalisation including people with disabilities and LGBT+ individuals in project design and policy development.
- **Forget to [address the risks of sexual exploitation, abuse, and harassment](#).**

Spotlight

[The Sakura Bus Project](#), initiated by UNOPS, aimed to ensure safe and inclusive mobility for girls and women in Mardan and Abbottabad, Pakistan. The project involved the provision of 14 buses exclusively for women and children under 12 years old. Additionally, UNOPS constructed 31 bus stops along designated routes in both cities, equipped with seating arrangements, shade, and reliable electric power supplied by solar panels to ensure well-lit environments. The project trained and recruited women drivers and conductors for the bus service. The project addressed women's safety concerns, such as lighting, visibility, and security at bus stops. The project incorporated gender needs throughout its stages, including the design and specifications of the buses and bus stops, as identified through evaluations of user requirements and existing transportation.

[The Liveable Cities Investment Project for Balanced Development in Georgia](#), funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), aims to enhance liveability and stimulate economic growth through the establishment of inclusive and climate-resilient infrastructure. The project incorporates various gender-related features to promote equitable outcomes. These include the integration of gender-sensitive urban infrastructure planning guidelines during the construction of public facilities, the dissemination of materials addressing gender-based violence and sexual harassment, which encompass reporting procedures and helplines, as well as the provision of support to women-led enterprises.

Want to know more?

- [Arup \(2022\) Cities Alive: Designing cities that work for women](#)
- [Infrastructure & Cities for Economic Development \(ICED\) Facility – Resources on Gender, Disability & Inclusion](#)
- [ICED Facility \(2018\) Transport: A Game Changer for Women's Economic Empowerment](#)
- [OECD \(2021\) Women in infrastructure: Selected stocktaking of good practices for inclusion of women in infrastructure](#)
- [UNOPS \(2020\) Infrastructure for gender equality and the empowerment of women](#)
- [World Bank \(2020\) Handbook for Gender-Inclusive Urban Planning and Design](#)
- Multiple helpdesk services offer research advice, expert technical guidance and know-how for HMG: [Disability Inclusion Helpdesk](#), [Ending Violence Against Women and Children Helpdesk](#), [WOW helpdesk](#) and [K4D Helpdesk](#).