GLOBAL CENTRE ON BIODIVERSITY FOR CLIMATE

August 2026

GCBC's GEDSI Approach



1. Who is this guidance for?

This guidance is intended for anyone developing proposals for, or implementing, GCBC-funded projects.

To receive funding, projects must demonstrate meaningful GEDSI integration throughout the project cycle in accordance with GCBC's stated ambition (below). Proposals that do not meet minimum GEDSI compliance standards will not be funded. Project teams must demonstrate appropriate GEDSI responsibility and capability, proportionate to the size, scope and risk profile of the project.

This may include dedicated GEDSI expertise for larger or higher-risk projects, or a named team member with relevant responsibility and access to guidance or support for smaller or lower-risk projects. Funded projects will be supported to deliver ambitious GEDSI work throughout the inception and delivery stages.

For projects operating in fragile and conflict-affected settings (FCAS), applicants must also demonstrate that GEDSI considerations are integrated alongside conflict sensitivity and do-no-harm principles, including an assessment of how conflict, climate vulnerability and social exclusion interact and how potential risks to affected groups will be managed.



Image shows women in Botech (Bodi) sorting through bush cabbage. Courtesy of University of Leeds.

2. Defining GEDSI

GCBC is a UK International Climate Finance (ICF) programme and has obligations to meet GEDSI compliance requirements set out in ICF guidance[1]. As per this guidance:

Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion comprise three closely related and equally important concepts:

- ***Gender Equality*** *aims to remove the unequal power relations between different gender identities in the pursuit of equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities for all.*
- ***Disability inclusion*** *is the process of ensuring the meaningful participation of persons with disabilities in all their diversity and ensuring the promotion and mainstreaming of their rights.*
- ***Social inclusion*** *is the process of improving the terms on which individuals and groups take part in society, improving the ability, opportunity, and dignity of those disadvantaged on the basis of their identity.*[1]

IPLCs face distinct, intersectional forms of exclusion tied to land, territorial governance, discrimination and in some cases, violence, on the basis of their identities. Their collective rights systems, gender dynamics, and governance structures require tailored participation, and consultation to achieve meaningful and equitable outcomes.

This approach is broadly covered by the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent and recently, the guidelines developed under Article 8j of the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (KM-GBF).

3. GCBC's GEDSI Ambition

GCBC's GEDSI Statement:

> *'By the end of 2028, all GCBC-funded projects will meet ICF minimum standards (GEDSI 'sensitive') on gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI), with an ambition for many to achieve GEDSI empowering standards, and where possible, projects will be supported in delivering transformational change.'*

GEDSI will be assessed as part of project selection and reviewed throughout implementation. Assessment will be proportionate to each project's size, scope, methodology, budget, risk profile and delivery context, so smaller, desk-based or lower-risk projects are not expected to demonstrate the same level of GEDSI activity as larger, field-based or higher-risk projects.

[1] UK International Climate Finance Guidance Note for Delivery Partners (2025)

How minimum compliance will be assessed at proposal stage:

1. To what extent is GEDSI integrated consistently across the proposal and reflected in key research decisions?
   - » Relevant GEDSI issues, differentiated effects, barriers and risks are considered and reflected in key aspects of the research where appropriate.
   - » The proposal includes measures to avoid harm, prevent exclusion and mitigate the risk of exacerbating inequalities.
2. How clearly is the proposal's GEDSI approach reflected in its overall purpose, rationale and intended results?
   - » Identifies relevant GEDSI issues or groups and indicates how the research will address differentiated barriers, risks or impacts and avoid exacerbating inequalities.

For more information, please see **Section 6**. Projects are encouraged to go beyond minimum compliance, though higher-ambition activities are not mandatory for all projects. For further details, applicants should refer to UK International Climate Finance Guidance Note for Delivery Partners (2025).

4. GEDSI in an R&D context

All ODA-funded initiatives are bound by legal requirements to reduce poverty and address gender inequality[2]. However, R&D can differ from more traditional development interventions. GCBC projects focus on generating evidence and innovations rather than implementing direct solutions. This requires deliberate consideration of how research outputs address GEDSI concerns, ensuring that methodologies are inclusive and outcomes do not inadvertently perpetuate inequalities. Contextual application of GEDSI principles is particularly vital, as R&D projects often operate within diverse social, cultural, and institutional contexts.

A failure to appropriately consider GEDSI in R&D can result in unintended negative consequences – in contravention of the principle of 'do no harm' – and poorer research outcomes.

Empirical evidence indicates that integrating rights-based, locally-led and gender-responsive approaches into biodiversity and climate research and action strengthens both the effectiveness and durability of outcomes.

[2] UK International Climate Finance Guidance Note for Delivery Partners (2025)

Embedding inclusion from research design through to implementation helps ensure that evidence, interventions and future investments reflect real social dynamics and differential vulnerabilities, maximising impact and resilience in diverse context[3].

Effective GEDSI integration in R&D, thus, hinges on inclusive stakeholder engagement. By actively involving marginalised and underrepresented groups throughout the research process where appropriate, projects can ensure that their perspectives and knowledge shape outcomes in meaningful ways. This can contribute to long-term capacity building by equipping these groups with skills and opportunities in scientific research, while fostering diverse, multidisciplinary research teams that reflect and address the needs of the communities they aim to serve.



Image: Indigenous women from the Pasto community, Colombia, at their resguardo restaurant initiative with Daniela Torres, Mama Genith Quitiaquez, Taita VIcente Obando, Ricardo Ibarguen, Wendy Toro and Rosa Emilia Salamanca of Corporación de Investigación y Acción Social y Económica (CIASE).

[3] Principles for Inclusive Nature Action: Driving gender-responsive, locally-led, rights-based approaches to sustainably using, protecting and restoring global biodiversity – GCBC

Table 1: GEDSI considerations throughout the research cycle. Puentes, A., and Martin, R. (CLEAN Helpdesk, 2026).

1. Idea generation, problem framing and research purpose	2. Partnership and Governance	3. Design and planning	4. Implementation and data collection	5. Analysis and validation	6. Outputs and dissemination	7. Uptake and legacy
Identifying the research problem, why it matters, whose priorities and knowledge inform it, existing evidence and knowledge gaps, intended users and potential implications of the research.	Establishing research partnerships, roles, decision-making arrangements, responsibilities, expertise, governance mechanisms, and relationships with affected communities or rights-holders.	Developing research questions, methodology, sampling, participation approaches, ethics and safeguarding arrangements, workplans, resources, accessibility measures, data-management plans and MEL systems.	Conducting fieldwork or other research activities; recruiting and engaging participants, obtaining consent, ensuring safe, accessible and meaningful participation; collecting and managing quantitative, qualitative or other forms of evidence.	Analysing evidence, considering differentiated experiences and outcomes, interpreting findings with relevant partners or knowledge holders, testing assumptions, validating findings and adapting the research where necessary.	Preparing research outputs, determining authorship and attribution, communicating findings in accessible and appropriate formats, returning findings to participants and communities, and disseminating evidence to different audiences.	Supporting the use of the research in policy, practice or further research; considering who benefits from the knowledge produced; governing future use of data and knowledge; sharing or reusing datasets where appropriate; and capturing longer-term learning.

5. How can we achieve this?

One key challenge lies in ensuring GEDSI goals are embedded in rigorous scientific processes, as the technical focus of R&D projects can inadvertently overlook the sometimes-complex needs of marginalised groups. Successfully aligning technical objectives with social considerations requires deliberate, integrated efforts throughout the research process.

Table 1, on the previous page, presents a framework to incorporate GEDSI considerations throughout the research cycle. Researchers must also ensure that GEDSI considerations are applied proportionally to the scope and objectives of their work, embedding these principles meaningfully without imposing undue complexity on the research process.

GCBC Programme Team Responsibilities

At the **programme level**, GCBC will endeavour to:

- Provide a clear GEDSI framework and expectations for all grantees.
- Offer and signpost periodic GEDSI learning sessions and technical guidance.
- Review and provide feedback on GEDSI Action Plans.
- Integrate GEDSI into grant monitoring, reporting and adaptive management.
- Share good practice and lessons across the portfolio.
- Ensure GEDSI considerations inform grant competition design, assessment and due diligence.
- Manage and monitor relevant OECD gender equality marker[4] expectations at programme or portfolio level, including the 80% marker where applicable.
- Ensure that GEDSI is consistently and visibly integrated across all GCBC communications, so grantees clearly understand that it is a core area of focus. This includes highlighting GEDSI considerations in project updates, guidance materials, success stories, and any messaging that outlines programme expectations or good practice.

[4] Principles for Inclusive Nature Action: Driving gender-responsive, locally-led, rights-based approaches to sustainably using, protecting and restoring global biodiversity – GCBC

6. Minimum compliance requirements for project teams

All GCBC-funded projects must meet the minimum compliance (GEDSI 'sensitive') requirements below. These requirements are mandatory and will be assessed proportionately according to the project's type, scale, budget, risk profile and delivery context.

- Undertake and document a GEDSI analysis during inception and project design.
- Develop a concise GEDSI Action Plan aligned to project objectives.
- Demonstrate how any GEDSI risks and inequalities identified will be addressed.
- Apply a "do no harm" approach and assess safeguarding and SEAH risks.
- Include meaningful participation of relevant marginalised groups in project design and delivery as appropriate.
- Collect and report disaggregated data by sex, age, disability and geography wherever feasible.
- Include GEDSI considerations within monitoring, evaluation and learning frameworks.
- Identify clear GEDSI-related outputs, outcomes or indicators as appropriate to the project objectives.
- Assign responsibility for GEDSI delivery within the project team and allocate adequate resources to support implementation.
- Report on progress against their GEDSI Action Plan in quarterly and annual reports.
- Report material GEDSI risks, safeguarding concerns and mitigation measures through regular project reporting mechanisms.
- Ensure data collection processes are safe, confidential and do not expose participants to harm.

Applications that do not demonstrate how these minimum requirements will be met will not be considered fundable. Projects must meet this threshold before higher-ambition GEDSI approaches are considered.

7. Beyond minimum compliance

The following actions are encouraged for projects that are able to go beyond minimum compliance to demonstrate an 'empowering' or 'transformative' GEDSI approach, where appropriate to the research context. Projects seeking to demonstrate higher-ambition approaches should provide evidence that GEDSI considerations actively influence project design, delivery, outcomes and decision-making processes.

Where grantees have evidence-supported reasons to believe that their work will help address practical barriers and support opportunities for increased equality (e.g. in access to assets, resources, capabilities or opportunities) a project may be considered 'empowering' in this area. Where grantees can show that their work will help to address prevailing power relations and support institutional and societal level changes that address inequalities a project may be considered 'transformative' in this area.

During the **Design** phase, projects are encouraged to:

- Undertake stakeholder mapping to identify women, marginalised groups, IPLCs, and other socially excluded groups relevant to the project context.
- Identify potential risks of exclusion, unintended harm or safeguarding concerns.
- Determine whether additional research or consultation is required to understand GEDSI dynamics and address identified evidence gaps
- Ensure project timelines allow sufficient time for inclusive engagement, consultation and accessibility adjustments where required.
- Allocate adequate resources for GEDSI-related activities, including accessibility and specialist input where necessary. For example:
    - Are meeting locations accessible?
    - Are materials available in relevant languages or formats?
    - Are costs allocated for meaningful engagement with community organisations?

During the **Implementation** phase, projects are encouraged to:

- Ensure that GEDSI is regularly discussed in team meetings.
- Meaningfully engage affected communities and socially excluded groups, not only consulting them.
- Monitoring whether participation translates into influence and decision-making power.
- Adapting activities if emerging risks or inequalities are identified.

For **Reporting Requirements**, projects are encouraged to:

- Disaggregate people related data by sex, age, disability and geography where feasible and meaningful.
    - To be considered 'empowering' for this element, disaggregated data should specifically reflect GEDSI focused outcomes. Where these outcomes are a principal programme objective, then the project will be considered 'transformative'.
- Integrate GEDSI analysis throughout reporting, not as a standalone paragraph.

For **Research Dissemination and Communication**, projects are encouraged to:

- Ensuring that GEDSI is consistently and visibly integrated across all project communications. This includes highlighting GEDSI considerations in project updates, guidance materials, success stories, and any messaging that outlines programme expectations or good practice.
- Reviewing and applying the approved GEDSI terminology list to ensure projects understand key concepts, share aligned definitions, and use consistent language across all materials.
- Communicating findings back to communities in accessible formats by reviewing and following the inclusive language and accessibility guidance, including the use of preferred terms, terms to avoid, and appropriate accessibility features such as alt text, captioning, and colour-contrast standards.
- Capturing qualitative 'stories of change' that demonstrate shifts in influence or access.

To be considered 'empowering', dissemination strategies should be co-designed with marginalised groups, to enable their leadership and ensure mutual benefit. Outputs should be both accessible and innovative, using cutting-edge or community-driven formats that set new standards for inclusion. Communication channels should be embedded in the communities they aim to reach, utilising trusted networks and culturally appropriate methods.

8. Safeguarding

Regarding Safeguarding, GCBC operates a **zero tolerance to inaction policy**. This means that when safeguarding violations occur, projects are expected to take steps to appropriately respond and use lessons learned to improve their Protection from Sexual Exploitation, Abuse, and Harassment (PSEAH) implementation.
All allegations of safeguarding violations must be reported immediately to oda.safeguarding@defra.gov.uk and gcbc@defra.gov.uk. You can download the incident report form here.

All projects **must:**

- Identify safeguarding risks, mitigating action and dedicated owners in your risk register. Risk registers should be reviewed with your project management team on a regular basis.
- Ensure you have appropriate policies, procedures and codes of conduct. More guidance is given in the resources section.
- Ensure you have accessible and confidential feedback and reporting mechanisms for staff and people interacting with your project. Check that they are accessible for all, including people with disabilities.
- Identify a safeguarding point of contact.
- Ensure all staff have received safeguarding training.
- Useful Safeguarding Resources:
    - The Resource and Support Hub (RSH) on Safeguarding is an FCDO-funded programme. The RSH Online Hub website is available in English, Arabic, French and Swahili and free for anyone working in the aid sector to use.
    - CAPSEAH Practical Guidance for minimum principles.
    - BOND is an umbrella organisation that connects, strengthens and champions a dynamic network of civil society organisations to eradicate global poverty, inequality and injustice. The Safeguarding Resources page provides information on safeguarding guidance, resources and tools to improve your safeguarding policies and procedures.

9. GEDSI in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings (FCAS)

Research in fragile and conflict-affected settings requires additional consideration of how GEDSI, conflict dynamics and climate vulnerability interact. In many FCAS contexts, women, IPLCs, people with disabilities, displaced populations, minority groups and other socially excluded groups may experience overlapping forms of vulnerability, exclusion and insecurity.

These dynamics can influence who participates in research, whose knowledge is recognised, who benefits from interventions and who bears risks. GCBC emphasises the importance of understanding both conflict-climate dynamics and how interventions may interact with existing tensions, inequalities and governance arrangements.

Projects operating in FCAS should therefore consider not only whether participation is inclusive, but whether participation translates into meaningful influence over project design, implementation and decision-making. Research that is technically strong but insufficiently sensitive to local conflict, power dynamics or exclusion risks may unintentionally reinforce inequalities, undermine trust or reduce the effectiveness and legitimacy of project outcomes.

Additional considerations for applicants working in FCAS

Applications relevant to FCAS **must** consider the following questions during project design and implementation:

1. Understanding conflict, exclusion and vulnerability

- How do conflict, fragility, climate vulnerability and social exclusion interact within the project context?
- Which groups are most affected by these overlapping pressures?
- Are particular groups excluded from decision-making, access to resources, services or opportunities?
- Could proposed research activities unintentionally reinforce existing inequalities or tensions?

2. Conflict sensitivity and do-no-harm

Applicants should consider how the project may interact with existing conflict dynamics and whether activities could:

- Reinforce existing grievances or exclusion.
- Increase competition over land, water, forests, fisheries or biodiversity benefits.
- Exacerbate tensions between communities or stakeholder groups.
- Increase risks to participants, researchers or partner organisations.
- Create unintended safeguarding concerns.

Where relevant, projects should identify measures to mitigate these risks and demonstrate how conflict-sensitive approaches have informed project design.

10. Summary

Overall, GCBC distinguishes between:

Mandatory Minimum Requirements: requirements that all funded projects must meet.

Empowering Approaches: approaches that actively improve equality of access, participation, capabilities and opportunities.

Transformative Approaches: approaches that seek to address underlying power relations, institutional barriers and structural inequalities.

GCBC expects all projects to meet minimum requirements and encourages projects to pursue empowering or transformative approaches wherever appropriate to the research context.

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