



GESI

GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

STRATEGY

2024 – 2029

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction: Strategizing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion	1
<i>How to Use the GESI Strategy.....</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>GESI and Adaptation</i>	<i>2</i>
<i>GESI Strategy Purpose.....</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>GESI Strategy Principles</i>	<i>5</i>
<i>GESI Strategy Priorities</i>	<i>6</i>
2 Operational Framework.....	7
<i>Theory of Change.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>GESI Pathway.....</i>	<i>8</i>
<i>Operational Framework.....</i>	<i>10</i>
Conclusion	12

1| Introduction: Strategizing Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

The Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Strategy, along with the corresponding Strategic Action Plan 2024-2029 are produced as part of an initiative to enhance the ARA’s capacity to support gender mainstreaming, social inclusion, and gender-transformative action. Developed based on an institutional assessment of the ARA and its membership, the strategy provides clear and actionable targets that guide the ARA’s work as an organization that facilitates networking, collaboration and peer-learning for its membership across the globe.

The GESI framework is designed to inform not only human resources policies but also the technical aspects of adaptation research and programming. It serves as a comprehensive guide for all actors—including government agencies, private sector partners, and alliances—to meaningfully integrate gendered concepts and social inclusion frameworks into their work. By doing so, the strategy aims to foster informed research and enhance the overall impact of adaptation initiatives.

In addressing GESI, the strategy recognizes the presence of hyper-marginalized groups, such as persons with disabilities (PWDs), indigenous peoples (IPs), and LGBTQIA+ individuals. These groups often face unique challenges that require specific and targeted strategies within the broader GESI framework. This is crucial, as many individuals may simultaneously belong to multiple marginalized categories—being men, women, rural dwellers, and economically disadvantaged—compounding their vulnerabilities. As such, the Strategy provides a foundation for understanding compounding vulnerabilities, and facilitates responsive GESI approaches.

Within this strategy, gender equality¹ and social inclusion² as frameworks serve to guide users and participating community members in the meaningful inclusion of gendered concepts and social inclusion frameworks so as to support informed research and enhance impact. Based on an assessment that highlights the ARA’s capacity to facilitate networking, the strategy aims to build on the strengths of the ARA and empower ARA members facilitate gender mainstreaming³ and lead peer-learning processes. The strategy is complimented by the Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategic Action Plan (GESISAP) and GESI Implementation Toolkit.

¹ Gender equality refers to equality and equal access of persons regardless of sex or sexual orientation.

² Social inclusion refers to the process of improving the circumstance of individuals and groups in a society or project context.

³ Gender mainstreaming refers to the integration of gender frameworks and perspectives in methodologies and planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting for the purpose of identifying and responding inequalities.

Within this strategy is an introduction to the Adaptation Research Alliance (ARA) Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Strategic Action Plan (GESISAP) 2024-2029, inclusive of a summary of the strategy development process, an overview of the Alliance’s role in facilitating GESI, and the narrative of the strategy purpose and alignment with Adaptation Research for [Impact Principles](#). This is followed by a theory of change and operational framework for the implementation of the GESI strategy and GESISAP.

Informing this Strategy, is the assessment of ARA internal and external operations, including a review of principles and guiding policies, organizational structure, and a survey of the ARA’s membership; findings of these assessments can be viewed in the ARA GESI Assessment 2024. Key findings of the Strategy resulted in core recommendations for the development of the four-document series presented as part of ARA’s GESI mainstreaming and strengthening efforts. Following the recommendations coming out of the assessment, this Strategy outlines an overall purpose and priorities for GESI in the work of the ARA and its membership, and subsequently provides an operational framework and theory of change. The strategy therefore guides the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan (GESISAP) and is supported by the GESI Implementation Tool-Kit.

How to Use the GESI Strategy

The ARA GESI Strategy includes:

Part 1: Understanding GESI and Adaptation Linkages, Strategy Purpose, Principles and Priorities

Part 2: GESI pathways, a 5-step operational framework for GESI, a 5-step theory of change that encompasses the process of GESI integration for the ARA.

The Strategy can be used by the ARA Secretariat to gather an understanding of the approach to GESI integration, and as a grounding document for the GESISAP and GESI Implementation Tool-Kit.

GESI and Adaptation

Understanding the intersections of gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) within climate adaptation efforts is essential for creating effective and sustainable solutions. The impacts of climate change are not felt equally across society; rather, they disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, often due to existing social inequalities. For instance, women, especially in rural areas, may face barriers to accessing resources and decision-making power, which can hinder their ability to adapt to climate impacts. Research shows that when women are empowered and included in climate adaptation planning, communities tend to be more resilient.

In the realm of livelihoods, women often dominate sectors such as agriculture and aquaculture. Their specific knowledge and experiences can provide valuable insights into sustainable practices, yet they frequently lack access to financial resources, training, and technology. By integrating GESI into adaptation projects, stakeholders can enhance food security and promote sustainable farming techniques that consider women's roles and needs.

Moreover, indigenous groups often have unique connections to biodiversity and ecosystems. Their traditional knowledge can offer innovative solutions to climate challenges. By incorporating their perspectives, adaptation strategies can be more culturally relevant and effective.

Recognizing the interconnectedness of these issues is crucial. For example, climate-induced migration may affect children's education, while individuals with disabilities may face increased barriers in accessing emergency services during climate-related disasters. Addressing these intersections in research, programming, and funding ensures that adaptation efforts are equitable, ultimately benefiting entire communities.

RESEARCH EXAMPLE

It is [reported](#) that climate change is already impacting crop yields and making it harder for traditional agricultural livelihoods to survive. Factors like flooding, drought, and increased pest infestations are all contributing to lower agricultural productivity. In response, men—who have historically been the primary agricultural producers—are migrating to cities in search of alternative income sources. This shift is changing women's roles, as they move from being primarily caretakers at home to becoming agricultural providers and land stewards.

To support this transition, women need training to enhance their knowledge and access to agricultural management practices. However, they often face obstacles in obtaining necessary inputs, equipment, and financing. Addressing these barriers is crucial for empowering women as agricultural producers.

Additionally, since women frequently do not own the land, they cultivate or the products they produce, it is vital to challenge traditional practices and beliefs that limit their decision-making power regarding land and output. Empowering women in these areas is essential for effective management of natural resources.

GESI-informed adaptation work should not just seek to include the needs of vulnerable groups in its analysis and response, it should also seek to be informed by and integrate the practices, solutions and adaptive measures that are undertaken by communities within affected areas.

RESEARCH EXAMPLE

Case studies in Southeast Asia highlight how autonomous community-led adaptation initiatives that are driven by local knowledge and traditional practices are successful in instances where the integration of climate change knowledge is facilitated through collaboration between governments, educators and communities, and has been successful in fostering resilience and sustainable development for participating communities ([ERIA, 2024](#)).

Facilitating programs that expand support for the roles of communities as well as empower them, particularly indigenous groups and women, as local knowledge guardians and knowledge sharers is important in protecting and employing their unique knowledge of resilient plant species, seeds, and agrobiodiversity.

These should not be just general commitments but active investment in supporting that knowledge, documenting it and actively integrating it into and within extension service support, early warning systems, digital solutions and governance mechanisms.

RESEARCH EXAMPLE

A study conducted in Amazonia which found that women were able to identify a greater range of plant species and plant parts that could be utilized for food, medicinal purposes, and other household uses as compared to their male counterparts. Similarly, a study from South Africa identifies a practice of women of stockpiling drought tolerant seed varieties from their home gardens and planting the seeds in extreme drought seasons, ensuring the survival of their crops at the end of the drought season ([IUCN, 2020](#)).

RESEARCH EXAMPLE

A study on agrobiodiversity and gender in Ethiopia found that concluded that women's knowledge of conservation is undervalued and under-documented, as assessments of the roles of women and men in land preparation, cultivation, processing and marketing as well as contributions to diversification found that there was a significant variation between women's and men's participation; findings show that women-managed lands reflected higher crop diversity, including in seed management and dietary food security ([Biodiversity and Conservation, 2022](#)).

Lastly, for adaptation research and programming to enable positive change for communities and the individuals within them, it must understand and respond to the differing roles of

community members based on age, sex, ability, livelihood source, location, and other key factors relevant to the project context.

Additionally, understanding how empowering vulnerable groups can create ripple-effects of change is key to sustainability and success. For example, [research](#) from the Morogoro Region of Tanzania shows that when women are more involved in decision-making on adaptation options for ecosystem services, their households are more likely to plant cover and drought-resistant crops, ensuring the sustainability of their yield.

GESI Strategy Purpose

The ARA is global collaborative effort will seek to catalyse increased investment and capacity for action-orientated research that supports effective adaptation to climate change – primarily in developing countries – at the scale and urgency demanded by the science.

The ARA Secretariat, hosted by SouthSouthNorth, serves as a coordination mechanism for Members, that advocates for informed and action-oriented research that can inform adaptation and resilience on a global level. The ARA is strategically placed to facilitate and enable informed research planning, as well as collaboration, peer-learning and partnership across its global membership.

The role of the Alliance is not to execute the GESI Strategy as a lone entity, but rather, to engage its membership to strengthen GESI in Member-led activities, leveraging the strength of the ARA network as social capital, and building the strength and impact of participating community members.

The ARA maintains that GESI is an integral part of facilitating research and knowledge generation for adaptation solutions that are sustainable, impactful, and resilient. The ARA will advocate for and facilitate through collaborative learning, the integration of GESI into the work of Members; this will strengthen the [ARA's intended impacts](#), including reducing climate risk and building resilience for the most vulnerable, improving access to climate finance for membership, and increased gender knowledge and capacity in developing countries.

GESI Strategy Principles

The GESI Strategy aims to build on the Adaptation Research for Impact [Principles](#), providing GESI-specific activities that guide the ARA's activities as an alliance. As such, the GESI strategy is guided by the following three principles:

Principle 1

The GESI Strategy will contribute to the Adaptation Research for Impact principle of being equitable in practice by offering impact-focused and measurable actions toward GESI mainstreaming.

Principle 2

The GESI Strategy will offer activities that are informed by and developed for user (member) needs, including the facilitating of peer-learning and co-production of knowledge.

Principle 3

The GESI Strategy will be evolving and flexible, enabling the ARA's ongoing growth as an organization committed to GESI, and will promote activities that support sustainable growth of the membership.

GESI Strategy Priorities

Based on the prioritized needs of the membership as shown in Figure 1, primary areas where increased capacity for gender application would be beneficial include research, capacity strengthening workshops and knowledge sharing, mainstreaming gender into monitoring and evaluation processes, and fostering partnerships and collaborations for gender-informed impact research through grants. Providing specific guidance for this GESI Strategy, the ARA membership listed priorities in the same order (as shown in Figure 1); these priorities guide the operational framework and theory of change presented in the following sections.

Figure 1: ARA Membership GESI Priorities (2024)



2| Operational Framework

This section provides an operational context for the development, implementation and continued updating of the GESI strategy. The operational framework for the ARA GESI Strategy (illustrated in Figure 3) involves five core components that are critical to supporting gender equal and socially inclusive adaptation benefits. This approach is in keeping with several global efforts which are deepening and expanding the concept of adaptation and adaptation benefits and how these are measured and accounted for.

This includes the Adaption Benefits Mechanism (ABM) which is leveraging important lessons from mitigation for adaptation and catalysing finance and investment, potentially, at the local level⁴. The work of the ARA in supporting critical research on adaptation can also play a critical role in informing such efforts as well as implementing agreed-upon goals and additional principles.

Though the ARA's focus is on Adaptation, the line between Adaptation and mitigation is a narrow one particularly for Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Moreover, mitigation require adaptation of processes and systems as well as shifts in attitudes and behaviour while adaptation requires mitigation of risks and mitigation of the costs of transition including possible social and economic displacement and dislocation. Building Resilience, particularly socio-ecological resilience requires a combination of adaptation and mitigation.

⁴ [Revision Mai 2017 \(abmechanism.com\)](https://www.abmechanism.com/)

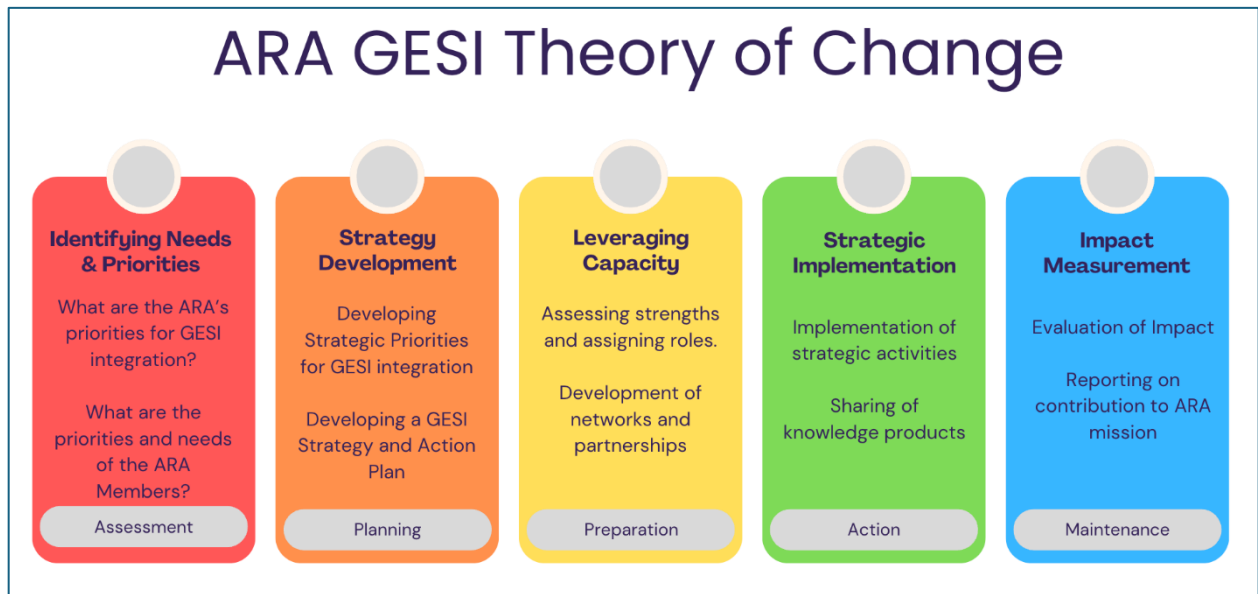
Two major adaptation areas of impact identified, given the broad scope of the membership, are Livelihood and Food Security as well Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services which are in themselves co-dependent and inter-related.

Theory of Change

The Theory of Change guiding the development of the GESI Strategic Action Plan (GESISAP) is that **if** the ARA enhanced its GESI-focused activities and mainstreams GESI into existing activities that seek to enhance the capacity and outputs of its membership, **then** the ARA will have successfully enhanced the GESI capacity of its membership and the organization itself, resulting in adaptation research and products that are GESI informed, with enhanced impact and sustainability. These activities are carried out **because** it is recognized by leading adaptation research and program funders that gender and social inclusion frameworks and action plans enhance the overall impacts, benefits, reach and sustainability of adaptation research and project implementation.

Outlining the process for GESI mainstreaming by the ARA, the following GESI Theory of Change framework provided in Figure 2 is developed based on the ARA’s current theory of change, so that the process of GESI integration on behalf of the ARA is streamlined with exiting priorities and processes.

Figure 2: ARA GESI Theory of Change



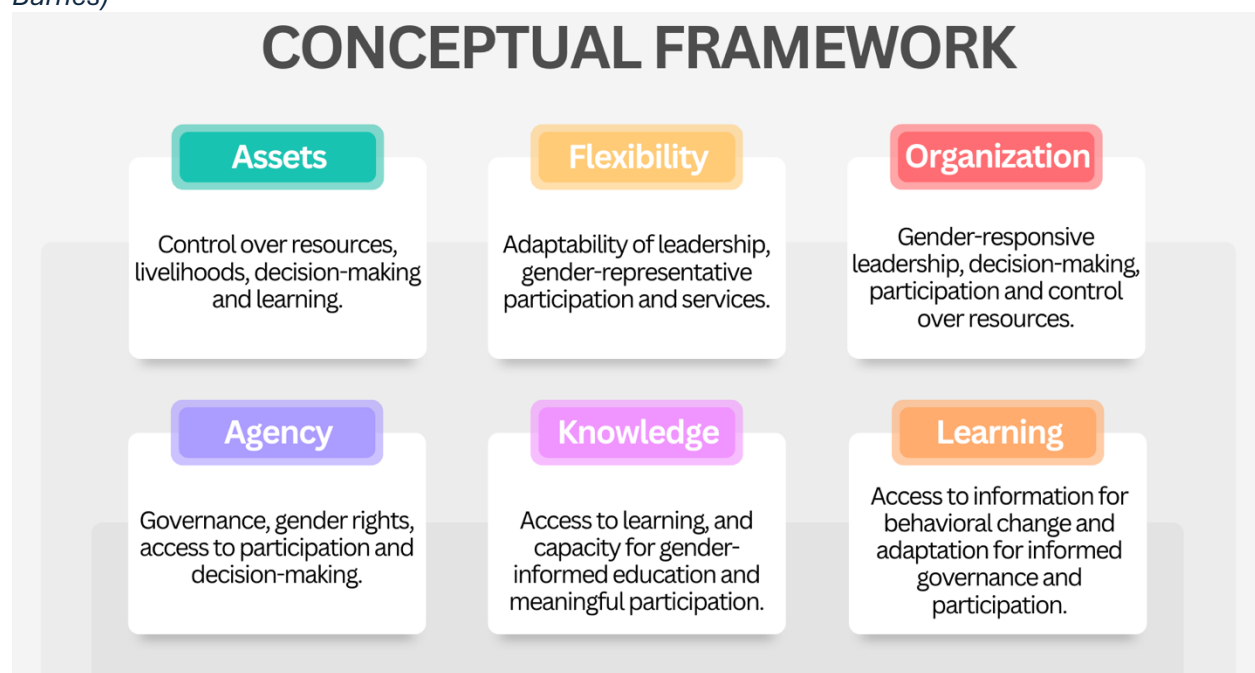
GESI Pathway

The ARA does not start from scratch in its gender journey as it builds on key strengths in the areas of social organization, flexibility and learning as well as critical opportunities in assets,

socio-cognitive change and agency. Through its network and as a Secretariat, it also has influence that can be harnessed in promoting and committing to GESI for and in adaptation across multiple contents and contexts.

The framework provided below (Figure 3) seeks to act as a capacity assessment framework, which can aid in clearly defining how the ARA can build on its strengths to further develop its impact areas to be GESI informed and responsive. This gendered approach also considers a normative framework in which gender justice must be accompanied by social transformations to be lasting i.e. that the GE and SI must work in sync for lasting and resilient change.

Figure 3: Capacity Assessment Framework (Source: SAEDI Consulting, Adapted from Cinner and Barnes)



To assist the ARA in developing the building blocks to deliver on these from a GESI perspective, pathways to change were identified through the lens of:

- Promising Barriers & Opportunities for Gender Integration,
- Entry points into existing Policies, Strategies, Guidelines and Plans,
- Enabling Institutional change via Investments in Human Resource, Capacities and Budgets,
- Appropriate forms of Interventions – Tools, Methods, Technology, Knowledge (including ARA’s contribution to these as well as an enabling environment to their creation, building on ARA’s network) and
- Reflexive Monitoring, Evaluation, Data, Learning & Feedback (building on ARA’s network structure which gives it both social capital and flexibility).

Operational Framework

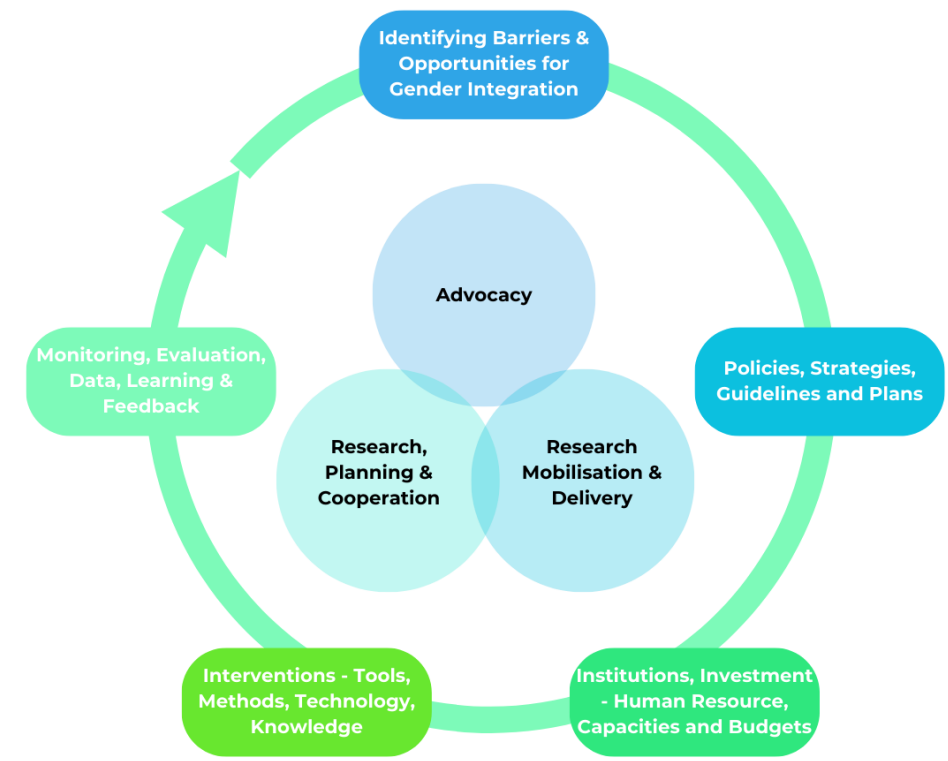
The ARA's strengths as identified in the assessment phase are key to an effective enabling environment and its opportunities are in areas that can deliver tangible adaptation benefits and in areas where gender continues to be weakly and inconsistently applied and where research is lacking.

The value the ARA can bring in addressing these gaps includes:

- harnessing its network for multi-scalar and multi-context experiences in adaptation including on issues of asset-building; and
- testing adaptation approaches and documenting lessons learned and good practice as well as local and indigenous knowledge particularly to strengthen knowledge and behaviour change, and agency-focused approaches.

The following Operational Framework (Figure 4) will guide the implementation of the GESISAP, provided as the corresponding document in this series.

Figure 4: ARA Operational Framework for GESI Integration (Source: SAEDI Consulting)



It should be made clear that the ARA and its network are not expected to directly contribute to asset-building as adaptation but could, via the micro-grants programme, and other initiatives ensure a more specific focus on interventions that either create the enabling environment for asset building and ownership including flexible mechanisms and that

support the kind of social and otherwise intangible efforts that are also expected to contribute to adaptive capacity and resilience.

The **first step** in executing the GESI Strategy is to elaborate further on GESI opportunities particularly in the ARA context and doing so within the ARA's key focus areas, including climate actions, livelihood and food security and biodiversity and ecosystem services. This can include a preliminary look at existing budgets and discussions on measuring interest in expanding GESI interventions for specific purposes. Of key importance in this phase is to identify those responsible for implementation and oversight of the GESI strategy, and also to identify the extent to which the ARA membership can and should be involved in this process.

Informing this strategy, the ARA membership has been consulted to assess the existing environment and opportunities, for the ARA's GESI Strategy; this supports the foundation of the strategy and provides an assessment with key insights for moving forward to GESI strategy implementation.

The **second step** is the implementation of the Operational Framework, identifying and developing policies, strategies, guidelines and plans. These components facilitate the enabling environment and processes for integrating a GESI strategy into existing and plans and projects. Thus, the development of this strategy is the starting point for ARA's continued development of GESI guiding documentation and is designed to support the Alliance's key goals in terms of GESI implementation and is accompanied by guidelines and plans that serve to facilitate a robust way forward in carrying out the intended projects and transformational shifts.

The **third step**, the relevant or developed policies, strategies, guidelines, and plans, is to develop or identify the supportive partners, including ARA members and host organization(s). This includes reviewing including human resource capacity and necessary budgets to facilitate the implementation of the GESI strategy. Partners identified during the initial assessment phase, in step 1, may be enlisted to drive forward and support the work in GESI in various projects.

The **fourth step** involves building out the required intervention methods and activities outlined in the GESI strategy. These can include acquiring the required tools, technology, methods and knowledge to support the implementation of the strategic action plan. This step builds upon all steps previously outlined in the theory of change, including initial consultations to determine needs, opportunities, gaps, and barriers; policies, strategies, and plans to implement the specific project; institutions, investment, human resource capacities, and budgets; and the required tools, technology, methods and knowledge required to carry out the project.

This **fifth step** of the operational framework, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), ultimately loops back into the initial step rather than acting as an end point; after a full cycle has been conducted in implementation of the operational framework and GESI strategy, new insights

and outcomes will be evident that can support the re-development, tailoring and improvements to GESI strategy.

The M&E process is cyclical, and with proper implementation and evaluation, can build upon itself to develop new and continuous improvements and innovations for GESI strategy implementation. Regular and ongoing M&E supports the implementation of the GESI strategy and strategic action plan, using indicators to ensure intended impact for participating community members, as well as the ARA itself. Data collection, both quantitative and qualitative, should be gathered at set intervals to determine project outcomes and intervention benefits or potential adjustments to be made. Upon completion of the strategy timeline/activities, an assessment of learning and feedback should be conducted. This could include follow-up engagement with all project implementation partners, staff, key stakeholders and community members. Learning and feedback can be conducted by in-person group debriefs and through survey methods to collect information on the outcomes of the project. What was done well, key outcomes, and learnings, as well as what could be improved are all important elements of this stage.

Ongoing and consistent monitoring and evaluation also enables the revision and updating of the GESI Strategy, and the development of subsequent iterations of the Strategic Action Plan.

The five steps outlined above should be implemented interdependently to ensure that the strategy itself is representative of the integration and mainstreaming elements that it is expected to deliver. They also at each stage help to define specific action on the three major areas through the lens of the key components of the strategy. The GESISAP presented in the next section elaborates further on the substantive elements of the ARA's expanded GESI journey from 2024 onwards and supplements with operational aspects, where necessary, given the ARA's unique mandate, structure and influence ecosystem.

Conclusion

Having provided the theory of change and operational framework to guide the implementation of GESI activities under the ARA, this strategy provides the foundation for the GESISAP, which provides strategic priorities, outcomes and an activity framework to manage the implementation and mainstreaming of GESI activities. The GESI Implementation Toolkit is also intended to be used in tandem with both the GESI Strategy and Strategic Action Plan, providing guidance and implementation tools.