

# Gender mainstreaming and social inclusion in Business Environment Reform programmes

*The GESI story of the Essor programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*

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# Abbreviations

<b>A2E</b>	Access to Electricity
<b>A2F</b>	Access to Finance
<b>AR</b>	Annual Review
<b>BE</b>	Business Environment
<b>BER</b>	Business Environment Reform
<b>CGED</b>	Cellule Genre du Ministère
<b>DCED</b>	Donor Committee for Enterprise Development
<b>DFID</b>	Department for International Development
<b>DRC</b>	Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>ESG</b>	Environmental, Social and Governance
<b>FCDO</b>	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office
<b>GESI</b>	Gender Equality and Social Inclusion
<b>GoDRC</b>	Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo
<b>GUCE</b>	Guichet Unique de Création d'Entreprise
<b>GUIGE</b>	Guide d'Intégration du Genre dans le Secteur de l'Energie
<b>M&amp;E</b>	Monitoring and Evaluation
<b>MEL</b>	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
<b>MSME</b>	Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises
<b>MTR</b>	Mid-Term Review
<b>OHADA</b>	Organisation pour l'Harmonisation en Afrique du Droit des Affaires
<b>PAM</b>	Portfolio Assessment Methodology
<b>PSD</b>	Private Sector Development
<b>RE IPP</b>	Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer
<b>RoI</b>	Return on Investment
<b>UCM</b>	Unité de Coordination et de Management

# Executive Summary

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), business owners and entrepreneurs face a number of constraints to growth.

In an attempt to identify, understand and overcome some of these constraints, in 2012, the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) – formerly the Department for International Development (DFID) - designed a comprehensive private sector development (PSD) programme in the country which aimed to *“foster sustainable economic activities to support the private sector to be an engine of green growth, job creation and poverty alleviation.”* [1] As part of this wider PSD programme, the Eссор programme was established in 2015, with an original focus on supporting the DRC to comply with the OHADA treaty.

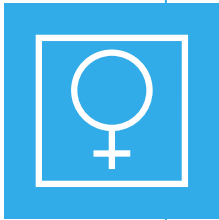
Although the above referenced constraints are particularly numerous and restrictive for female business owners and entrepreneurs in the DRC, in its early years, the Eссор programme did not prioritise gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) considerations within its work plans. This was because the programme, like many others of its kind, was initially guided by the common misconception that BER is gender neutral. However, whilst this may be the case in theory, in practice - as Eссор discovered - this is far from the truth.

Upon this realisation, and with support and encouragement from the FCDO, Eссор began to invest more in its GESI activities. Two years into the programme, Eссор hired a specialist consultant to develop a GESI strategy and, subsequently, another advisor to support the implementation of this strategy. These investments represented a significant move in the right direction. However, at times, the programme still struggled to integrate GESI considerations into its activities and operations in a sustainable way.

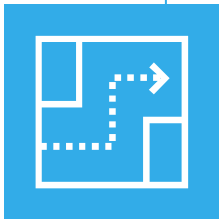
Nonetheless, the programme continued to move in the right direction, in large part thanks to the commitment of Eссор leadership. Most notably, practical tools were developed and dedicated training and coaching sessions were delivered to programme staff in order to increase their confidence and capability with regards to GESI. Before long, this effort was rewarded, as some staff began to actively seek out opportunities to integrate considerations for female entrepreneurs and business owners into their day-to-day activities, as well as their engagements with counterparts from the Government of the DRC (GoDRC). Most importantly, GESI-specific interventions, which placed equality and inclusion at the core of their scope, started to be designed and delivered.

Even though Eссор’s GESI journey started slowly and its progression was not always linear, upon reflection it is clear that the programme made good progress, and achieved noteworthy successes, with regards to GESI mainstreaming.

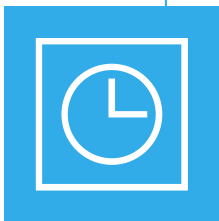
Despite such accomplishments, with the benefit of hindsight, the authors of this report have identified activities which could have been enhanced, or opportunities which could have been maximised, in order to further strengthen the programme's GESI outcomes. The three key 'lessons learnt' from Essor's experience are:



Donors to and implementers of BER programmes must actively combat, from inception, the widespread misconception that business environment reform is gender neutral.



Mainstreaming GESI in a meaningful way requires a well-defined strategy which: a) targets BER areas with high returns on investment for women; b) can be constantly adapted; and, c) addresses gaps in staff knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as broader programme cultures and systems.



It is never too late to start mainstreaming GESI in BER programmes.

By sharing these 'lessons learnt' in this report, the aim is to provide practical recommendations for other BER programmes, both current and future, so that they might effectively mainstream GESI considerations into their work.

# Introduction

**Business environment constraints are *not* gender neutral. This statement is contrary to widespread perception amongst many business environment reform programmes.** Although in principle it is true that business laws, regulations, procedures and frameworks are generally *not* discriminatory, in reality they can easily translate into practices which have a disproportionately negative effect on women - often as the result of underlying constraints which place women in a position of vulnerability. [2]

## Programme context

The Essor programme forms one part of the FCDO's overarching PSD programme in the DRC (Table 1). Broadly, this programme seeks to improve incomes for local men and women in the DRC by establishing well-functioning markets which foster economic opportunities. [3]

Within the wider context of this PSD programme, Essor was initially designed to address constraints and support reforms to improve the country's business environment, with interventions focusing on: OHADA [4]; access to finance; and, anti-corruption. Throughout Essor's seven year lifespan however, the portfolio of activities evolved, expanded and contracted in response to opportunities and constraints in the DRC. At the point of programme closure in 2022, Essor comprised two workstreams: business environment reform and access to electricity (A2E).

From a GESI perspective, it is important to note that BER programmes rarely work directly with end beneficiaries. Rather, they work with the institutions responsible for developing, implementing and enforcing policies which either directly or indirectly affect women and men. Since policy and institutional reform tends to be the central focus of BER interventions, rather than women and men, considerations for how women and men may be impacted by change often receives less attention. This frequent deprioritisation of GESI on BER programmes explains, in part, the slow start of Essor's GESI journey. The correlation therefore between Essor's improving GESI performance and the broader flux in workstreams is not a coincidence. As the nature of Essor's work evolved, more opportunities arose which allowed for direct beneficiary engagement and, by extension, meaningful GESI mainstreaming.

Business Case (2012)	Programme Closure (2022)
OHADA* Anti-Corruption* Fund for Inclusive Finance Making Markets Work for the Poor	Business Environment Reform* Access to Energy* Inclusive Market Systems Development Decision Support Unit

**Table 1:** DRC PSD programme components in the original business case (2012) and at the point of programme closure (2022). Specific components of the Essor programme are indicated with an asterisk (\*).

## **Country context**

In the DRC, businessowners and entrepreneurs face a number of constraints to growth, with women facing even more obstacles than their male counterparts. Such obstacles include: discriminatory socio-cultural norms; low literacy levels; limited control over assets and financial resources; lack of technical skills (particularly with regards to business/ financial management); poor access to information, energy, technology, distribution networks, and markets; time-related constraints; and, security concerns. [5]

More broadly, beyond the business context, the country faces a myriad of significant political, security, economic, health and social issues.

## **Report structure**

Drawing predominantly from interviews with former Essor GESI advisors, as well as annual review and evaluation documents, the first part of this brief explores Essor's GESI mainstreaming experience, identifying key successes and lessons learnt from this journey. The second part of this report offers an updated framework for GESI in BER, as well as guidance for BER programmes seeking to effectively mainstream GESI. This document is intended for BER practitioners, as well as donors financing BER programmes.

# Part I

## *Essor's GESI Story*



## Stage 1 - Misperception

The original FCDO (then DFID) business case for the PSD programme in the DRC lists constraints facing women entrepreneurs and business owners, acknowledging the importance of improving economic opportunities for women and adolescent girls:

*“Recovery of the private sector in the DRC is vital for job creation and poverty alleviation. Development of the private sector would generate vested interests in peace by providing alternative livelihoods for those that would otherwise take up arms. It would expand the economic choices of women and adolescent girls.” [6]*

This business case incorporated considerations for women and adolescent girls into nearly all aspects of the PSD programme *except* the OHADA workstream:

*“OHADA does not contain specific actions with respect to women; it is a universal legal treaty applicable to all businesses in the DRC which will promote broad-based economic development.” [7]*

This initial steer away from mainstreaming GESI across the OHADA workstream had two key consequences. Firstly, it reinforced the widespread misconception that business environment reform is gender neutral. Secondly, because OHADA was the key component to Eссор at the point of inception, it facilitated the deprioritisation of GESI activities more broadly on the programme.

As a result, upon mobilisation, Eссор undertook a very limited number of foundational GESI activities. Valuable exercises, such as analysing gender-based constraints or collecting baseline information on female entrepreneurs and business owners, were not conducted. Moreover, GESI-related indicators were not included in the programme logframe.

For the earliest phase of the programme, Eссор consequently operated without a clear GESI objective or framework. It was only after two years into programme implementation that this initial misdirection began to be actively corrected.



## What were the lessons learnt at this stage?\*

### 1 **Research and design solutions with women (and men) in mind.**

Consulting single and mixed gender entrepreneurship groups at the start of a programme enables a better understanding of the unique opportunities and constraints which exist within the target business environment. This helps to identify business environment reforms with high return on investment potential for female and male entrepreneurs and business owners. This, in turn, allows for implementation approaches to be designed which can ensure equitable access to new reforms for women and men.

### 2

#### **Commit to accountable BER from the start.**

Business reforms require accountability. Therefore, it is important to include indicators and targets in the programme logframe from the point of programme conception. This has a dual effect of (a) helping to monitor the inclusivity and equity of newly implemented reforms and (b) encouraging a greater emphasis on GESI mainstreaming activities.

### 3

#### **Commit to inclusive and equitable BER from the start.**

Inclusive access to, and equitable benefit from, BER is never guaranteed. Nonetheless, conducting intentional scoping of reform activities at the start of a programme can help to place users at the centre of the solution, rather than policies or processes.

*\*It is important to note that these 'lessons learnt' have been identified with the benefit of hindsight. Throughout its seven year lifespan, the Essor programme made a concerted effort to implement these recommendations. In many instances, as described in this report, these efforts were successful. However, the authors recognise that by focusing even more time and resources on these activities earlier on in the programme, greater GESI outcomes could have been achieved.*

## Stage 2 - Realisation

In 2017, Eссор faced pressure from the FCDO to improve performance and increase investments into GESI activities. In response, Eссор undertook important steps to significantly improve gender mainstreaming across all areas of operational delivery.

As a first step, the programme hired a GESI consultant who was tasked with developing a strategy which would allow gender-sensitive activities to be added or augmented, without derailing programme momentum.

Once finalised, this strategy proposed three project-level recommendations, each of which were taken forward:

1) Recruit a Senior Gender Specialist - An International Gender Expert was hired to support the ground-level implementation of the new GESI strategy. Over the course of 2018, this advisor supported Eссор to upgrade its gender efforts in order to ensure a more comprehensive and sustainable approach to realising gendered impact on the programme.

2) Hold regular gender learning events within Eссор - Commencing in early 2018, the Eссор programme: conducted individual capacity building sessions with each of the workstream teams; ran a whole-team gender workshop focused on the Gender Strategy; and, facilitated ongoing quarterly coaching calls between the International Gender Expert and each of the Workstream Leads.

3) Design and deliver a project wide gender campaign - In 2018, Eссор supported the GoDRC to run an awareness campaign for the GUCE (the single window business registration site). Eссор played a crucial role in ensuring that GESI considerations were incorporated into this campaign. In particular, Eссор helped to design a gender responsive way to target female business owners. This was achieved by ensuring (a) that women were visible within the campaign (for example, female entrepreneurs were featured on billboards and women's voices were included in adverts) and (b) that the channels used and the content delivered both recognised and targeted the specific needs and preferences of women, whilst also taking into account their existing levels of awareness, literacy and mobility etc.

In addition to these project-wide suggestions, the strategy also proposed thirteen workstream-level recommendations, some of which were not progressed. Although this was in part due to time, capacity and cost constraints, this lower uptake at workstream level compared to project level shed light on an underlying issue which remained present on the programme, despite broader GESI investments and changes: some Workstream Leads still did not have the adequate appetite for GESI to actively incorporate gender mainstreaming into their work.

Of course, this was not the case for all workstreams. For example, at this time, the OHADA workstream - spurred on by the recommendations made in the GESI strategy - identified, and followed through with, an opportunity to incorporate gender considerations into the 'Entrepreneur' pilot. The results of this work were particularly positive (Case Study 1).

## Case Study 1

In 2018, the OHADA workstream ran a pilot which encouraged entrepreneurs and business owners to register as '**Entrepreneurs**'. The pilot had three goals:

- 1) Increase the operationalisation of the 'Entrepreneur' status (a business registration status aimed at self-employed individuals with insufficient income to register as an individual enterprise);
- 2) Support the formalisation of the DRC business sector and economy; and,
- 3) Enable newly registered business owners and entrepreneurs to enjoy the benefits which registration can offer (for example, reduced overpayment of taxes and increased access to banking, health and training services.)

Originally, the pilot planned to focus on taxi drivers - a predominantly male profession. However, Essor steered the pilot to be more GESI aware, choosing to focus instead on Kinshasa's '**mamans malewa**' - predominantly **female street-side food vendors**. Encouraging registration by offering business skills training and increased access to health insurance products and financial services, the pilot successfully registered **432 Entrepreneurs** in less than one year. **Nearly 70% of all registrations were women.**

Nonetheless, despite these significant steps forward, the 2018 Mid-Term Review (MTR) levied a critique against the gender sensitivity of the entire programme:

*"There is little evidence that most of [the Programme's] interventions are designed specifically to benefit women."*

Later in the same year, the 2018 Annual Review (AR) made a similar finding:

*"Step-down training of trainers on female entrepreneurship skills, delivered to 226 people, does not have an evident connection to business environment reform."*

In response to these criticisms, Essor worked hard to elevate yet further the importance and visibility of GESI on the programme. Crucially, at this point, changes were made to Essor's systems and processes to ensure that gender was effectively mainstreamed at all key decision-making and reporting points throughout the programme lifecycle. As part of these changes, distinct and comprehensive reporting on gender as a standalone, cross-cutting issue in the Quarterly and Annual Reports was introduced. Moreover, a full-time team member (the Operations Manager - who was part of the in-country core team) was made the GESI contact

point. In this role, Essor's Operations Manager conducted fortnightly calls with the part-time International Gender Expert. In addition to this, the Expert held more regular meetings with Workstream Leads. Most notably, the progress of GESI mainstreaming started to be tracked via a Gender Matrix on Essor's PAM programme management dashboard. This matrix: set out each intervention's mainstreaming approach; provided a snapshot to indicate how each intervention was performing from a gender perspective; assessed the gender potential of each intervention, understood through two equally weighted measures - depth of impact and breadth of impact; and, incorporated gender-sensitive recommendations to render each intervention more responsive for women.

This last investment was particularly well recognised in the 2019 AR:

*"The PAM dashboard has been a positive step to address the problem of systematising and recording the project's work on GESI mainstreaming."*

However, despite this progress, implementing, monitoring and measuring gender and social inclusion impacts remained a challenge for the programme. The 2019 AR attributed this to the modest engagement to date in the space:

*"Monitoring, measuring, and attributing gender and social inclusion impacts continues to be limited in the Essor project. Mixed performance from Essor is also an outcome of their modest engagement with the GESI space more generally: there is a limited range of meaningful gender impacts to report on."*

## What were the lessons learnt at this stage?

**4 Set the tone early on, and from the top, that GESI is everyone's responsibility.**  
Explicitly clarifying GESI expectations to all stakeholders early in a programme's lifespan can help to reinforce the importance of GESI mainstreaming. Moreover, ensuring that senior stakeholders recognise and reward good GESI practices undertaken by technical and operational programme staff (as well as GoDRC counterparts) can help to incentivise the achievement of more GESI-specific outcomes.

**5 Implement a plan, but ensure it is adaptable.**  
Develop a plan which: a) identifies and reflects the opportunities and constraints facing women (and men) business owners and entrepreneurs; b) targets policies, processes and/ or practices with a high return on investment, whilst also aligning with the programme's overarching Theory of Change and logframe; c) takes into account the pre-existing knowledge, skills and attitudes of staff, partners and stakeholders; and, d) is flexible, such that it can be updated (based on consultations with staff, partners and stakeholders) as the programme evolves.

**6 Use Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning to improve BER inclusion and equity.**  
Effectively mainstreaming GESI is a journey which should get better with time. As discussed in Lesson 3, including specific GESI indicators in the programme logframe can help a programme to maintain focus on delivering GESI impact throughout the programme lifespan. This can also be achieved by: a) monitoring, disseminating and reflecting on findings with regards to inclusion and equity; b) employing gender-sensitive data collection techniques\*; and, c) involving gender experts in all activities\*\*. [9]

*\*The Lubumbashi study, conducted in 2019, offers a good example of gender-sensitive data collection on the Essor programme. As part of this study, data regarding cost, time and trust (in relation to the single business window registration expansion) was disaggregated by gender. On top of this, quarterly business registration numbers were also disaggregated by gender.*

*\*\*On the Essor programme, the FCDO gender lead was invited to deliver a talk to the Essor team regarding safeguarding and GESI mainstreaming.*

## Stage 3 - Correction

Unfortunately, in 2019, the GESI advisor left the programme to pursue a full-time role elsewhere. Despite this, and even with programme closure looming, Essor hired a new GESI advisor who was tasked with updating the GESI strategy which could be used to further advance GESI mainstreaming activities on the programme.

Although modest in its ambition, due to the limited time remaining on the programme, the new strategy emphasised: a) prioritising achievable, measurable wins which would either contribute directly to Essor's impact and sustainability or reduce GESI-related risk on current workstreams; b) understanding and telling Essor's GESI story; c) meaningfully mainstreaming GESI considerations into programme management systems and processes; and, d) strengthening staff capacity to implement GESI activities.

Around this time – and in line with a broader workstream flux, which saw certain workstreams close and others be enhanced – the new GESI advisor began to explore other opportunities for GESI mainstreaming. Newly identified activities tried to influence more strategic areas, such as: gender representation; the gender sensitivity of staff; the gender responsiveness of services provided by partner institutions (i.e. the GUCE); and, the gender responsiveness of processes (i.e. the A2E solar mini-grid tendering process).

In 2019, Essor received an extension. Given the addition of two years to the programme's lifespan, the new GESI advisor expanded the strategy to be more ambitious. Crucially, with this additional time, the advisor focused attention on Essor staff, working closely with them to help: a) better their understanding of what their role could be, from a GESI perspective; and, b) resolve any constraints preventing them from undertaking more GESI activities.

One such constraint which was very quickly identified was the entrenched perception that BER is gender neutral, a misconception which – as previously explained – had impeded the mainstreaming of GESI considerations since the start of the programme.

To correct this notion, the advisor focused on demystifying what it meant to be 'Doing GESI' within the Essor context, the process of which included:

- Pinpointing BER areas or activities for which GESI considerations were/ were not relevant;
- Outlining staff competencies (which were tailored to the programme's overall GESI ambition and the prevailing staff GESI capacity) and developing an associated [GESI checklist](#);
- Helping staff to identify relevant GESI entry points for their work; and,
- Developing and delivering training sessions on 'Doing GESI' and 'Engaging Men in Gender Equality.'

The intention of this work was to move programme staff away from a passive role and towards an active, decision-making role regarding GESI investments and activities in their workstreams. A further objective of these efforts was to encourage even more collaboration with the Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) team, which would thus improve GESI documentation on the programme.

In parallel to the above, the GESI advisor collaborated with a newly appointed Operations Manager to understand and tell Essor's GESI story. To do this, they developed two technical briefs which outlined the specific ways in which GESI considerations were relevant for the BER GUCE workstream and the A2E RE IPP workstream. They also developed and circulated three lessons learnt reports drawing from recent programme experiences. These reports highlighted the specific ways in which certain GESI considerations had been overlooked and how the programme could avoid similar missteps in the future.

Collectively, these deliverables reinforced the message that was previously disseminated at the 'Doing GESI' staff training: GESI is everyone's responsibility. Broadly, this message was well received. In particular, staff who were already interested in (or, at a minimum, curious about) the topic were galvanised to do more. Unfortunately though, there remained a small number of staff members who remained open to GESI ideas, but rarely followed through to implementation

To try and resolve this imbalance, the Essor programme invested in additional staff coaching and training, specifically for those in leadership roles. A new focus was also placed on conducting and disseminating GESI related research. These investments spurred Essor's leadership to further mainstream GESI considerations into management systems (e.g. risk registers etc.), tools and templates (e.g. ToRs etc.).

Such strategic investments ended up generating a steady flow of research and learning. This progress was acknowledged in the 2020 AR:

*“Essor has carried out a number of GESI related evidence and learning exercises to better articulate how changes to the business environment would have equitable impact for women.”*

Moreover, these investments resulted in several activities which responded to the 2018 MTR call for lasting and meaningful GESI improvements. Such improvements included the introduction of, and training on, social inclusion criteria in the mini-grid tendering process (Case Study 2) and the development of a gender mainstreaming guide for GoDRC's Ministry of Energy (Case Study 3).

Unfortunately though, not all GESI investments made in the last years of the programme achieved the same levels of success. Most notably, investments to integrate GESI considerations into the operations of the GUCE did not enjoy the expected and/ or desired uptake, despite repeated efforts to emphasise their importance (Case Study 4).



## Case Study 2

Throughout 2018/19, the A2E team worked closely with GoDRC to develop the **solar mini-grid project tender**. Guided by the GESI Advisor, Essor successfully advocated for the **inclusion of ESG criteria** within the tender process. As part of this criteria, bidders were obligated to describe their **GESI equality plan** and, crucially, how this would be implemented in practice.

One critical criteria which was incorporated into the tender was that of **mandatory site visits** to the three pilot locations. From a general perspective, these visits were arranged in order to enable bidders to better understand the economic, political and business contexts of the three locations. From a gender perspective, these visits offered bidders the opportunity to **talk to local women** in order to better understand: their roles within the local economy; the ways in which access to reliable electricity might impact their lives; and, more broadly, their level of knowledge around the solar mini-grid plans. Such interaction was critical, given that women often manage household budgets, including purchasing decisions around energy supply.

During the planning of these site visits, the risk that the visits would be majority male was raised. To combat this concern, the Programme Director ensured that a **female A2E project manager (PM)** would accompany the bidders and attend the site visits. Although this resulted in additional expenses, this increased cost was more than justified by the considerable impact which the PM was able to deliver. Ahead of the trips, the PM contacted **local women's organisations** to invite them to meetings in each town - something they had not participated in before. Moreover, as protocol prevented meeting attendees from speaking, after each main meeting the PM made sure to swiftly set-up informal follow-up meetings with female participants to clarify key messages and respond to any queries. Overall, the inclusion of the female project manager helped to ensure that women's groups at the three sites were consulted in a **safe and empowering** way.

In addition to incorporating ESG criteria into the tendering documents, the A2E team - in collaboration with the GESI Advisor - also **delivered ESG training** to four UCM personnel, three of whom were members of the tender review and selection committee. The training offered guidance on how to **analyse the GESI component of the bid**. It was so well received, that a repeat session for a larger audience was requested.

**The inclusion of ESG criteria in the solar mini-grid tender process had not been done before in the DRC. It has proven to be such a success that the World Bank is now considering replicating the model.**



### Case Study 3

In late 2020, the Essor A2E team partnered with the CGED (as well as a number of other agencies) to support the production of a **gender mainstreaming strategy focused on the DRC energy sector**. The guide discusses: the impact of gender on the energy sector; the stakeholders who can and should mainstream gender; the various levels (e.g. strategy, policy etc.) at which gender can be mainstreamed; and, the tools and strategies which can be used to do this. Crucially, the guide proposes a framework for monitoring the implementation of the recommendations championed throughout the document.

Developed to be a **practical guidance tool** for *all* stakeholders (women and men) who have a role to play in **affecting gender change** within the energy sector, the final version of the '*Guide d'Integration du Genre dans le Secteur de l'Energie en Republique Democratique du Congo*' (GUIGE) was validated in June 2021. Led by the **female A2E project manager**, this intervention was a particularly noteworthy success as nothing like it had ever been produced before in the DRC. Ultimately disseminated across more than 40 areas of the DRC Government, the GUIGE has the capacity to **fundamentally shift the gender makeup of the country's energy sector..**

### Case Study 4

In late 2019, the GESI team - in consultation with the BER team - ran a **research study** to investigate the **barriers** which **female entrepreneurs** were facing when registering their businesses at the GUCE. The survey conducted during this first phase of this study confirmed previous findings which indicated (a) that the GUCE had made it easier and cheaper for women to register a business, and (b) that the introduction of the GUCE was more significant than the actual changes to the DRC legislation.

For the second phase, which commenced in early 2020, the M&E team ran a series of focus group discussions which explored the above-described findings in more detail and tested proposed solutions. Crucially, these focus groups were run with both male and female entrepreneurs and business owners, in order to determine the key similarities and differences in their experiences of **business registration**.

Once conducted, the intention for the third phase was to then present these findings to the GUCE in order to advocate for the development and implementation of a more targeted strategy which could better support females in the business registration process.

However, unfortunately, despite a number of attempts to do so, these findings were never presented back to the GUCE. This was partly due to the business interruptions caused by Covid-19, and partly due to other operational activities and issues within the GUCE taking precedent.

## What were the lessons learnt at this stage?

**7 Make GESI a regular topic of discussion.**  
Be sure to discuss GESI on a regular, and informal basis, as well as during formal review periods. Frequently ask questions to evaluate how GESI considerations are being integrated into programme activities and to identify whether any further opportunities can be maximised.

**8 Reinforce the message that GESI is everyone's responsibility.**  
Cultivate a shared sense of responsibility for GESI mainstreaming across all staff members on all workstreams of a programme. Ensure that donors and evaluators help to build this collective responsibility, via the influence they have on programmes and, specifically, their role in prioritising programme activities.

**9 Enshrine GESI commitments in the logframe.**  
Incorporate GESI-related targets into the programme logframe so that GESI activities cannot be deprioritised. Mandate the inclusion of such targets so that workstream activities remain oriented towards reforms with equitable access and benefits.

**10 Collaborate in order to achieve GESI results**  
Ensure that donors and evaluators play a complementary role when it comes to implementing GESI on a programme. Ensure that GESI mandates are set from 'top-down,' but also driven by 'bottom-up' demand. Ensure that evaluators include specific GESI recommendations in their reviews.

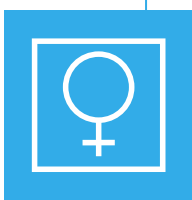
# Conclusions and Lessons Learnt

Essor's journey to effectively mainstream GESI and create meaningful impact for women entrepreneurs and business owners was slow to start. However, over time, the programme managed to achieve momentum, resulting in a number of key GESI successes, both small and large.

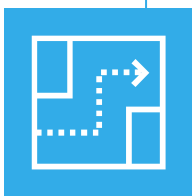
At the point of programme conception, Essor was misguided by the common notion that BER is inherently gender neutral. In the earliest years of the programme, little was done to combat this misperception.

However, with time, and thanks in large part to the commitment of the FCDO and Essor leadership, the programme started to pay more concerted attention to the value of mainstreaming GESI. The introduction of practical tools, training and coaching led to increased confidence amongst programme staff. In turn, certain staff identified ways in which GESI considerations could be integrated into management tools, reports and research. Moreover, newly motivated staff began to seek out opportunities to integrate considerations for women entrepreneurs and businesses owners into their day-to-day activities, as well as their engagements with GoDRC counterparts. Most importantly, GESI-specific interventions, which placed equality and inclusion at the core of their scope, started to be designed and delivered.

Even though Essor's progression was not always linear, upon reflection it is clear that the programme made significant progress, and achieved noteworthy successes, with regards to GESI mainstreaming. The three key 'lessons learnt' from the programme's experience are as follows:



Donors and implementers of BER programmes must actively combat, from inception, the widespread misconception that business environment reform is gender neutral.



Mainstreaming GESI in a meaningful way requires a well-defined strategy which: a) targets BER areas with high returns on investment for women; b) can be constantly adapted; and, c) addresses gaps in staff knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as broader programme cultures and systems.



It is never too late to start mainstreaming GESI in BER programmes.

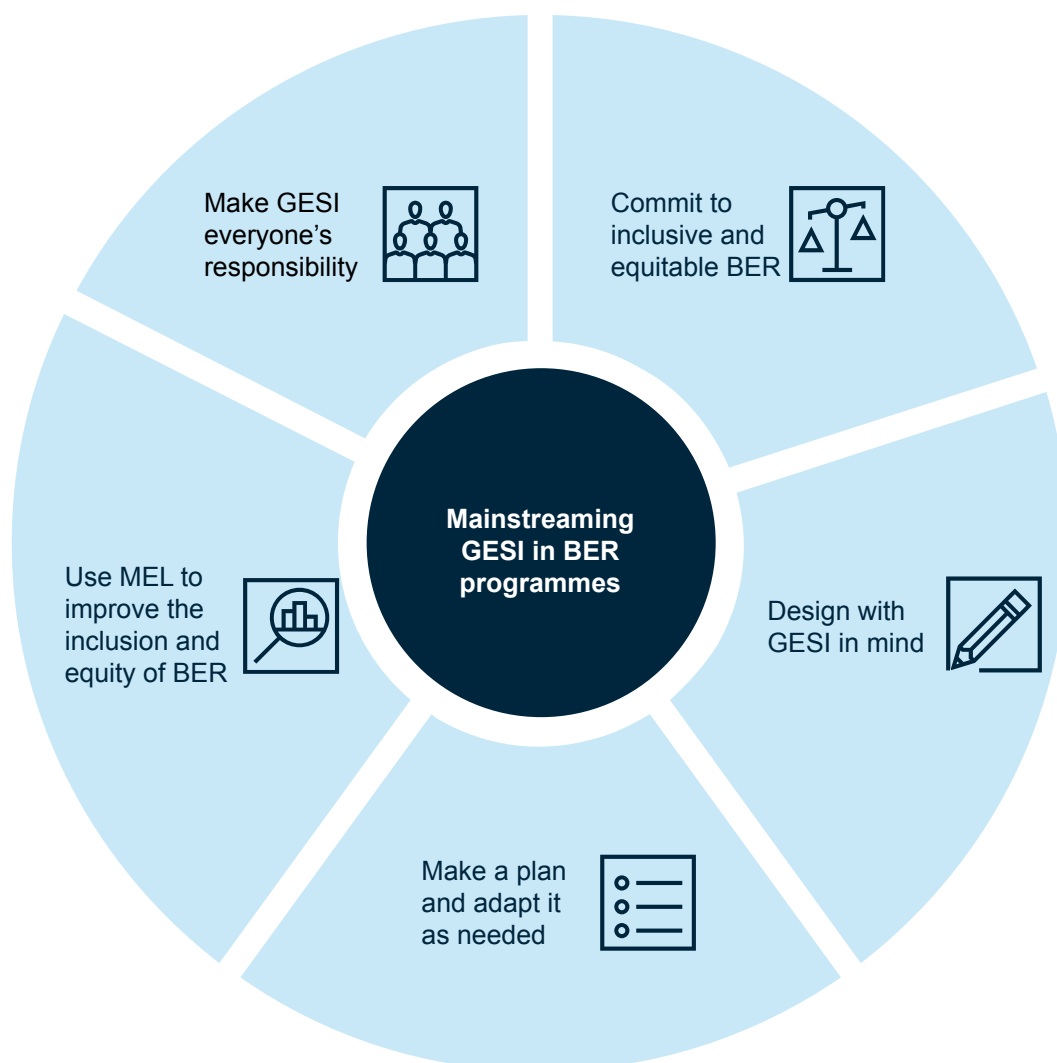
# Part II

## *Mainstreaming GESI in BER Programmes*



# Recommended Framework and Practices

At present, and especially in comparison to other economic growth areas, literature on mainstreaming GESI in BER programmes is thin. [10, 11] Drawing on this modest pool of literature, the Essor experience *and* the authors' experience of mainstreaming GESI across numerous other economic growth programmes, this brief offers an updated approach for mainstreaming GESI in BER programmes. Crucially, this updated approach recognises the organisational change process that is required to successfully mainstream GESI, offering recommendations for BER programme implementers, as well as donors and evaluators.



## Set the tone from the top that GESI is everyone's responsibility



<b>Implementers</b>	Ensure that the programme's definition of GESI is clear, and well communicated.
	Be explicit about the expectations for programme staff with regards to mainstreaming GESI and achieving GESI-specific outcomes.
	Recruit BER experts with the GESI knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to identify opportunities and implement inclusive activities. If these experts can't be found in the market, build such capacity within the programme.
	Incentivise and recognise good GESI practices by programme staff, partners and stakeholders.
	Set (and monitor progress towards) inclusion and equity goals for the programme's operations (for example staffing, contracts, grant funding, etc.).
<b>Donors/ Evaluators</b>	Ask programme staff members, on a regular basis, about the ways in which they are considering GESI as part of their work.
	Recognise good GESI practices by programme staff, partners and stakeholders.
	Monitor, on a regular basis, the programme's progress towards achieving greater inclusion and equity within its activities and operations.

## Commit to inclusive and equitable BER



<b>Implementers</b>	Scope activities (where appropriate) which place the user (e.g. female business owner, male entrepreneur) at the centre of the solution instead of the policy/process.
	Include GESI indicators and results in the logframe in order to hold the programme accountable.
<b>Donors/ Evaluators</b>	Ensure that meaningful (but achievable) GESI related targets are incorporated into programme design/ delivery.
	Engage programme staff in regular discussions about how they see their work contributing to inclusion and equity.
	Allow time for meaningful advances in inclusion and equity to take place, recognising that such progress will not necessarily follow a linear path.

## Design with women and men in mind [12]



<b>Implementers</b>	<p>Conduct research, and consult extensively with women <i>and</i> men, in order to understand the existing business environment constraints for entrepreneurs and business owners. Design GESI interventions and activities based on these findings.</p>
<b>Donors/ Evaluators</b>	<p>Encourage programme staff to consult extensively with women, and other underrepresented or excluded peoples.</p>
	<p>Ask how the voices of women, and other underrepresented or excluded peoples, are being listened to and incorporated into programme or activity design.</p>

## Make a GESI strategy and adapt it as needed



<b>Implementers</b>	<p>Develop a GESI strategy which reflects the opportunities and constraints facing women entrepreneurs and business owners, and other underrepresented or excluded peoples. Align this strategy with the programme's overarching Theory of Change and logframe targets.</p>
	<p>Focus on policies, processes and/ or practices which have a high return on investment for women entrepreneurs and business owners, and other underrepresented or excluded peoples.</p>
	<p>Consult regularly with stakeholders (in particular, M&amp;E experts) in order to identify what is/ isn't working and adapt the strategy accordingly.</p>
<b>Donors/ Evaluators</b>	<p>Review the GESI strategy at different stages of programme implementation, asking if and how it is being adapted in response to regular evaluations.</p>

## Use Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning to improve the inclusion and equity of BER



<b>Implementers</b>	Employ gender sensitive data collection techniques.
	Recognise that ensuring the effective participation of women may require additional time and resources.
	Monitor and disseminate findings on inclusion and equity on a regular basis, both internally and externally. Encourage discussion and reflection on these findings.
	Require gender expertise on evaluations and research projects. Ensure this condition is met by including requirements in ToRs and interview questions.
<b>Donors/ Evaluators</b>	Encourage programme staff (and partners/ stakeholders) to collect and report (gender) disaggregated data.
	Confirm the use of gender sensitive data collection techniques for research and evaluation projects.



# Annex



## GESI Checklist Questions\*

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Understands and articulates the impacts of current workstream activities on female beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Who benefits (directly and/ or indirectly) from the activities?</li> <li>● What kind of benefits do they derive from the activities?</li> <li>● Do certain groups benefit more/ less from the activities?</li> <li>● What kind of negative impacts could occur as a result of the activities?</li> </ul>
Identifies - on a quarterly basis - areas in which positive outcomes of workstream activities can be strengthened for female beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Which activities have the most/ least potential to strengthen positive (or mitigate negative) outcomes for female beneficiaries? Why?</li> <li>● What changes and/ or resources are necessary to achieve these improved outcomes for female beneficiaries?</li> </ul>
Assesses and weighs the feasibility and impact (both positive and/ or negative) of implementing identified activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● What is the expected impact (e.g. finance, access, agency, other) of the proposed changes?</li> <li>● Are there potential 'winners' (in addition to female beneficiaries) and 'losers' of the proposed changes? If so, who?</li> <li>● What will be needed to implement the proposed changes (e.g. resources, expertise, time)? Are these requirements available?</li> <li>● If delivered through a partner, what is the partner's capacity to implement the changes?</li> <li>● Is the timeline for implementation feasible?</li> <li>● What is the potential learning from the proposed changes?</li> <li>● How does the potential for impact and/ or learning compare to the cost and feasibility?</li> </ul>
Documents the rationale to pursue (or not) changes in workstream activities to strengthen positive (or mitigate negative) outcomes for female beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Why were the proposed changes pursued (or not)?</li> <li>● What impact have the changes had?</li> <li>● Are any alternative options available which could be (or are being) pursued?</li> </ul>

\* NB: Impacts can be direct and/ or indirect. Likewise, beneficiaries can be direct/ indirect.

## GESI Checklist Questions\* (cont.)

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Monitors and reports on the positive and negative impacts of workstream activities on female beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●What is the impact (e.g. finance, access, agency, other) of activities on female beneficiaries? How does this compare with the impact on male beneficiaries?</li> <li>●What actions are being taken to maximise positive impacts?</li> <li>●What (if any) negative impacts are being observed? What actions are being taken to minimise these negative impacts?</li> </ul>
Flags and follows-up on GESI related opportunities/ issues to GESI advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>●What (if any) GESI related issues need to be raised with the GESI advisors? Why?</li> <li>●What is the status of GESI related issues which have been raised previously with the GESI advisors?</li> </ul>

\* NB: Impacts can be direct and/ or indirect. Likewise, beneficiaries can be direct/ indirect.

# Footnotes



## Footnotes

- 1 Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, *Private Sector Development Programme in the Democratic Republic of the Congo*, Development Tracker, viewed 18 November 2021, <<https://devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-203161/summary>>
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- 2 Carmine Soprano, *Gender Strategy Review - Final Report*, December 2017
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- 3 Decision Support Unit (OPML), *Private sector development that 'Does Development Differently': DFID's Private Sector Development Programme in the DRC*, learning brief, viewed 18 November 2021, <[https://beamexchange.org/uploads/filer\\_public/77/14/77142081-150b-42ad-8c05-3686a166fcf5/181108\\_dsu\\_learning\\_brief\\_1\\_en\\_final\\_compressed.pdf](https://beamexchange.org/uploads/filer_public/77/14/77142081-150b-42ad-8c05-3686a166fcf5/181108_dsu_learning_brief_1_en_final_compressed.pdf)>
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- 4 NB: The main objective of the Organisation for the Harmonisation of Business Law in Africa (OHADA) is to address legal and judicial insecurity within the 17 member states.
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- 5 Carmine Soprano, *Gender Strategy Review - Final Report*, December 2017
- 
- 6 *ibid.*
- 
- 7 *ibid.*
- 
- 8 NB: Inclusivity and equity should also be monitored using qualitative methods in order to capture nuances and contextualise change.
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- 9 NB: Actions (a) and (b) were implemented by Essor towards the end of the programme.
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- 10 NB: One of the few pieces of literature on mainstreaming GESI in BER programmes is the [Business Environment Reform and Gender](#) (2016) report, published by the DCED. They also published a [case study on gender sensitive BER and informality](#) (2017).
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- 11 NB: While not exclusively focused on GESI, the recently published [Investment Climate Reform Toolbox](#) (2021) does contain a useful Gender Diagnostic Tool and a Gender-Sensitive Public-Private Dialogue Checklist
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- 12 NB: Depending on how each individual programme defines GESI, this may include other less represented or excluded groups.

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