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Mainstreaming gender in transboundary natural resources projects – the experience of the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) project

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ABSTRACT

The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) project aims to improve the lives of men and women depending on the fisheries resources of the Bay of Bengal. Despite the major role women play in fisheries, the contents of the project documents have however remained gender-blind. The paper proposes that the Theory of Change offers a compelling framework to consider how this could be redressed in an ex-post manner, enabling transboundary natural resources projects such as the BOBLME project to contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment. Practical steps are suggested. They include the elaboration of a high-level statement of political will to gender equality and the consideration of gender-sensitive actions and cross-cutting issues covering communication, gender-disaggregated data collection and governance. A commitment to impact through human capacity building and the allocation of adequate budgets for gender mainstreaming, is fundamental to embrace the change process that progress towards gender equality requires. In line with the Theory of Change, the development of a pathway to impact and use of gender-sensitive outcome mapping as a form of monitoring and evaluation are suggested as pivotal in capturing the changes expected from

Abbreviations: BOBLME, Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem; CCRF, Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries; EAF, Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries; FAO, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; GEF, Global Environment Fund; M&E, Monitoring and Evaluation; NAP, National Action Plans; SAP, Strategic Action Programme; TDA, Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis

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mainstreaming gender in the project and the project's own influence in progressing towards gender equality in the region. The mainstreaming approach proposed could be generalised to other transboundary natural resources projects of a similar institutional and operational structure to the BOBLME project.

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1. Introduction

The Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem (BOBLME) comprises the Bay of Bengal itself, the Andaman Sea, the Straits of Malacca and the Indian Ocean to 2° S. It is an area of high biodiversity and vulnerable habitats including high seas, coastal fringes, islands, reefs, continental shelves and coastal and marine waters. Fish catches from the Bay of Bengal total six million tons per year. However, over-exploitation of marine living resources, degradation of coastal habitats and pollution stemming from increases in coastal population densities, industries and tourism, and high consumer demand for fish products, threaten the BOBLME (BOBLME, 2012a). These threats are also compounded by the dependence of the poor on coastal resources for their livelihoods, and a difficulty to implement joint fisheries management plans. To revert them, the eight countries bordering the BOBLME¹ have come together under the Global Environment Facility (GEF)-funded, Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)-implemented BOBLME project to lay the foundations for a coordinated programme of action. The goals of this programme are to strengthen the regional management of the Bay of Bengal environment and its fisheries, and to improve the lives of the coastal populations.

It is estimated that the BOBLME countries are home to over 50% of all of the world's coastal poor (Brown et al., 2008), and their vulnerability to natural disasters is acute (BOBLME, 2012b). Fishing provides direct employment for two million fishers who operate primarily in coastal and inshore waters, and to over 5.5 million people directly employed in ancillary activities (BOBLME, 2012b). Gender issues in the use of the Bay of Bengal fisheries resources have however not been documented in any depth (e.g. Samarakoon (2004) and Townsley (2004)). This is symptomatic of the general lack of attention to gender dimensions in fisheries and marine environment development and conservation, despite the important role women play in these sectors (Williams et al., 2012).

Yet, this is hardly surprising. Gender does not figure in the Code of Conduct for Responsible Fisheries (CCRF), and came into the Ecosystem Approach to Fisheries (EAF) as an after-thought to ensure that human, and *a fortiori* gender, dimensions of fisheries were adequately covered in the implementation of the EAF (De Young et al., 2008). Gender issues have not been well mainstreamed in the national development strategies and fisheries policies of the eight countries of the Bay of Bengal either (BOBLME, 2012g). Discussions of gender issues and ways to progress towards a reduction in gender inequality are often confined to specialist journals and organisations. Guidance on the mainstreaming of gender in large natural resources management projects is also scant². As a consequence, gender issues often tend to fall through the cracks of natural resources project cycles either because they are, voluntarily or involuntarily, not considered in planning stages and added as an after-thought later on, or simply because they are not adequately translated into actions that can make a difference to the lives of the targeted beneficiaries when it comes to project implementation.

The BOBLME project is a typical example of such an oversight. Whilst the project has explicit human development objectives (“diversified livelihoods and improved wellbeing of small-scale fisher communities”) and expected outcomes (“enhanced food security and reduced poverty for coastal

¹ Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Sri Lanka and Thailand.

² For example, the GEF International Waters guidance on governance and socioeconomics (Olsen et al., 2006) mentions the word “gender” only once and the word “women” not at all. In other words, even the more specific guidance for LME projects is totally gender-blind.

communities”) (BOBLME, 2005), it is overall blind to the issues that need addressing in order to progress towards gender equality and women's empowerment in these communities (BOBLME, 2012g).

This shortcoming was identified at the project mid-term review (Office of Evaluation, 2012). In order to address it, the BOBLME project proactively commissioned an audit of the gender sensitivity of all its documents (BOBLME, 2005, 2010, 2011a,b,d,e,f, 2012a,b,c,d,e,f). It also requested guidance on how to mainstream gender in its forthcoming strategic outputs (i.e. Strategic Action Plan – SAP) and implementation phases at national levels (i.e. National Action Plans – NAP). The decision to give due emphasis to gender makes the BOBLME project a pioneer in this regard: no other GEF-funded large marine ecosystem programmes have so far explicitly considered these issues in their implementation (BOBLME, 2012g). The audit prompted a reflection on the necessary steps to mainstream gender in an “ex-post” manner, i.e. when a project is already well underway. It also led to a deeper consideration of the importance of transformative change in gender theories and as an integral part of project conception, implementation and monitoring. The objective of this paper is to pursue this reflection and demonstrate that, through careful design, gender issues can be successfully tackled, even in an ex-post manner, in projects with primarily environmental goals and which have inadvertently omitted gender in their design. The paper is framed by the Theory of Change, which is used to analyse the challenges related to gender mainstreaming in natural resources projects, including the BOBLME project (Section 2). The Theory of Change also supports the design of practical steps through which gender issues can be mainstreamed in planned project outputs (Section 3) and in particular in monitoring and evaluation (Section 4). The last section underscores the potential for replication of the proposed approach to other transboundary projects and concludes.

2. Framing gender mainstreaming in transboundary projects with the Theory of Change

2.1. *The Theory of Change*

From an earlier conceptualization as a theory of how and why an initiative works (Weiss, 1995, cited in Stein and Valters (2012)), a Theory of Change is “a way to describe the set of assumptions that explains both the steps that lead to a long-term goal, and the connexions between these activities and the outcomes of an intervention or programme” (Stein and Valters, 2012, p. 3). This description is based on a process of reflective analysis and critical thinking about the sequence of events that is expected to lead to a desired outcome (Vogel, 2012). This is relevant to the mainstreaming of gender in natural resources and transboundary projects for several reasons: (i) although not new, it is a progressive approach to embrace the complexity of change, to demonstrate how results can be achieved, and to promote locally/nationally-owned development; (ii) it is recognised as helping moving beyond “business as usual”, through greater contextual awareness and clarity about the rationale, assumptions and long-term goals of development programmes (Vogel, 2012); and (iii) gender is a cross-cutting and complex issue that is best captured through flexible, non-linear frameworks. The Theory of Change has also been found to help with strategic planning (better design of interventions in relation to expected outcomes) and with the monitoring and evaluation of projects, allowing organisations to assess their contribution to change and to reassess their interventions (Stein and Valters, 2012). This last point is of particular relevance to the BOBLME project.

2.2. *The challenge of gender mainstreaming in transboundary natural resources projects*

Box 1 defines key gender concepts. Mainstreaming gender, or a gender perspective, is “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming is to achieve

Box 1–Key gender concepts.

Gender is the socially and culturally constructed identities of men and women. Gender refers to the roles, responsibilities, access and opportunities of men and women, boys and girls, in a society. The terms “equity” and “equality” are sometimes confused in their application to gender. **Gender equity** refers to the *process* of fair and just treatment of women and men (i.e. the set of actions, attitudes, and assumptions that provide opportunities and create expectations about individuals) to reach gender equality. **Gender equality** is *when men and women are being treated equally and have equal opportunities and responsibilities*. In the context of international development, gender equality exists when women and men are able to live equally fulfilling lives. Working towards gender equality implies enhancing the capability of women and men to enjoy a status and opportunities that enable them to realize their potential to contribute to social, economic and political development, and challenging the conditions that prevent them to do so (World Bank, 2012, Sen, 1999).

The handling of gender in policies and approaches has led these to be distinguished according to their sensitivity to gender and the extent to which they contribute to gender equality (after March et al. 1999): **gender-blind** policies/approaches are policies/approaches that make no distinction between men and women, which leads to a bias in favour of existing gender relations. The possibility of differential outcomes for men and women, or of outcomes that impact on relations between them, is either not acknowledged or considered to be incidental. On the other hand, **gender-aware** policies/approaches, are policies/approaches that recognize that women have different needs, interests and priorities, that women’s involvement is determined by gender relations which make their involvement different, and often unequal, but that both women and men are equal development actors (March et al. 1999).

gender equality” (ECOSOC, 1997, p. 2). Gender mainstreaming therefore involves a process of change, a “transformation of unequal social and institutional structures into equal and just structures for both men and women”. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2002) goes even a step further by saying that “Mainstreaming is not about adding a “woman’s component” or even a “gender equality component” into an existing activity. It goes beyond increasing women’s participation; it means bringing the experience, knowledge, and interests of women and men to bear on the development agenda”. In a project, this implies that “business as usual” is challenged and that questions of gender are taken seriously in all project activities, instead of being left as the sole responsibility of “marginalized, peripheral backwater of specialist women’s institutions” (Charlesworth, 2005, p. 1).

Gender and the environment are intimately linked. Gender mediates environmental encounter, use, knowledge, and assessment. Reciprocally, gender roles, responsibilities and expectations shape all forms of human relationships to the environment (Seager and Hartmann, 2005). Thus, touching on either the environment or gender will impact on the other and vice-versa. Mainstreaming gender in transboundary natural resources projects therefore provides a means by which simultaneous progress towards environmental sustainability and gender equality can be made. Gender mainstreaming is also justified on arguments of justice and equality, credibility and accountability and quality of life (UNEP, undated). Finally, gender equality contributes to economic growth, whereas the opposite is not always verified (Kabeer and Natali, 2013).

However, gender is unevenly mainstreamed across agencies and projects (Risby and Todd, 2011). There are two overarching reasons for this. The first is that gender mainstreaming requires some preliminary “homework” to first get a picture of the prevailing “gender landscape” (situation of men, women and their power relations in a given context, obtained through a gender analysis) and to reflect on how the issues identified through this preliminary investigation could be worked into a project’s objectives, activities and resource allocation. Time, expertise and budgetary constraints, as well as multiple development priorities often get in the way of such an undertaking, especially if a project has other immediate objectives than improvements in wellbeing.

The second reason relates to resistance to change. Mainstreaming gender is a political act (March et al., 1999). In contrast to health and sanitation projects that more naturally lend themselves to the integration of gender considerations, transboundary natural resources projects for which gender equality is not a primary aim tend to face more resistance in their engagement with these issues.

Overcoming political resistance and misalignment between project objectives (usually reflecting its donor's priorities) and countries' priorities regarding gender mainstreaming and equality requires in-depth engagement and dialogue. This is however usually constrained by time, changing priorities and limited human and institutional capacities.

Mainstreaming gender in a project whose implementation and milestones have already been decided upon involves a fundamental conceptual shift and a profound reconsideration of the ways in which "gender" is written in project documents. The framework offered by the Theory of Change can support this process because it opens up opportunities for the building of flexibility in project design and implementation. From this flexibility, in the form of repeated interactions, communications and dialogue between stakeholders at different levels on gender issues, stems the potential to embrace change (Habitat, undated; Lentisco and Alonso, 2012). In turn, this has been shown to lead to the progressive integration of gender in organisational development and in the institutions and processes that affect men and women's lives and their relationships with the natural environment (Holvoet, 2008).

Gender mainstreaming can also help bridging disciplines and operational scales. Transboundary natural resources management, as well as technical development project agendas and gender equality discourses, can be reconciled if both natural and social scientists make respective efforts to broaden their understanding of each other's discipline and concerns (CGIAR, 2006). Similarly, a better understanding of scale interactions and feedback loops between a project's interventions and the overall environment in which it operates can allow overcoming the mismatch between the wider scale of environmental studies and the fine-grained and local analysis of gender issues on one hand, and between the causal relationships between local happenings (both environmental and social) and larger processes and drivers of change on the other. Challenging stereotypical preconceptions about the relationship of women and nature should be an integral part of this process (Seager and Hartmann, 2005).

The on-going completion of BOBLME's SAP therefore constitutes an opportunity for the project's intentions to be explicitly re-interpreted so as to ensure that gender issues are addressed and that planned project actions achieve more than economic and environmental wellbeing. The following section proposes a range of practical steps to do so. These equally apply to the outputs of other transboundary projects with a similar institutional and operational structure.

3. *Ex-post* mainstreaming of gender in the strategic outputs of transboundary natural resources projects

Intentions of triggering meaningful change need to be made explicit in guiding project documents and strategic outputs. These should reflect the in-depth process of questioning undertaken by project staff to challenge their views and broaden their outlook on the ways project interventions are meant to ultimately benefit men and women in target groups.

3.1. Political will for gender equality

Bringing all key project parties together to agree on the changes that need to be achieved and outcomes that should be aimed at is a prerequisite for effectiveness and fairness in environmental decision-making (Reed, 2008). Leadership commitment, in particular, is fundamental to trigger long-term changes in mind-sets and organisation that gender mainstreaming requires (Risby and Todd, 2011). A sign of such a commitment to the principle of, and desire to enhance, gender equality at local, national and regional levels could be in the form of a joint statement of political will, or a "gender mainstreaming Charter", signed by all project member governments, at senior level. Assistance from a gender expert should be sought to draft this statement or Charter so as to ensure that its terms resonate enough with the mandate of the institutions of those signing it. This will ensure that they are accepted and last over time, as well as clearly specify *how* and *by whom* gender mainstreaming is to be undertaken. Alternatively, a written statement of the commitment of all project partner countries to gender equality in the future implementation of project activities could be included at the outset of

key project documents and outputs. Ideally, transboundary projects' SAPs should include amongst their objectives one about progressing towards gender equality. A simple reword of the objective the BOBLME project to alleviate poverty and improve the lives of coastal populations could, for example, make this intention clearer by specifying “the lives of *men and women equally* in coastal areas”. This would set forth a more gender-sensitive tone to the rest of the SAP and show a greater awareness of gender equality.

3.2. *Selection and design of gender-sensitive actions*

Although the inclusion of gender-sensitive actions may be the most obvious way to ensure that gender concerns are taken into account in a transboundary natural resources project, it is relatively easy, in the planning of such activities, to fall in the Women in Development/efficiency rhetoric (cf. Harvard Framework) and to perpetuate the failings of past mainstreaming initiatives. Local, field-level activities should therefore do more than simply write women in their design (Risby and Todd, 2011): actions need to specify the groups they are targeting (e.g. actions for men, for women, and actions addressing the relationship between them). For example, in the case of co-management of natural resources, women need to participate in, and be consulted during co-management meetings, *and* have their opinions heard and fully taken into account in decision-making processes. Similarly, post-harvest and micro-finance activities are typically involving women, but are not the only activities where women play an important role in the fish value chain (FAO, 2007). Ensuring that the actions included in SAPs are gender-sensitive therefore involves asking “Will this action affect men and women differently?”. If the answer is yes, as it is most likely (though this in itself requires some gender awareness), the planned action needs to be refined and some preliminary gender analysis carried out regarding the extent and reason(s) for that difference. Exploring the gender equality implications of each proposed action may lead to a complete re-think of the way each action is developed and implemented. It may also reveal the need for the project to address a different set of issues or to adopt a different priority ordering of issues.

3.3. *Cross-cutting issues*

Many cross-cutting issues such as human capacity, institutional and organisational arrangements, communication, data management and budget allocation, as well as the way monitoring and evaluation is carried out, influence the speed and direction of change. These cross-cutting issues are also gender-laden. As such, they constitute entry points for tackling gender issues and can open up opportunities to progress towards gender equality.

Critical cross-cutting issues for increasing a project's influence on gender equality include:

3.3.1. *Communication and information flows about gender within the project*

Gender specialists are likely to remain a minority and to work amongst non-gender specialists. Ensuring that gender-related information imparted to non-gender specialists, such as the natural resources and fisheries management experts and officials involved in the BOBLME and other transboundary projects, trickles down to field level is a challenge. The identification of a “gender focal point” to “disseminate gender-based knowledge resources across sectors at the country or field level, as well as to provide informal backstopping and advice to supplement formal training” can help mitigate it (Risby and Todd, 2011, p. 41). Gender focal points need however to have a clear mandate, with clear responsibilities and well-defined functions, for their role to be credible and valued by both their non-specialist project peers and project stakeholders. The way awareness is raised and gender issues are communicated within the project also needs to be regularly monitored as part of the project implementation.

3.3.2. *Gender-disaggregated data collection*

The plea for gender-disaggregated data to be collected is a long-standing one (Bennett, 2005). This not only means that figures or facts should relate to men and women's condition separately, but also

that the process of collecting data be gender-sensitive, i.e. that male bias be avoided through, for example, the careful planning and organisation of meetings, focus groups, interviews, etc. at community and household levels. Gender studies in the fisheries and aquaculture sectors are often limited to a description – both qualitative and quantitative – of labour divisions in relation to particular tasks, but more rarely examine the reasons behind these or resulting benefits for women (Arthur et al., 2013; Brugere et al., 2014). Although gender-disaggregated data is crucial (especially for the establishment of a baseline, the monitoring and evaluation of impacts and for reporting requirements), it is not sufficient on its own to generate insights into the prevailing gender relations and power (im)balances between men and women. Supported by gender experts, project counterparts at national and local levels, including NGOs, have a particular role to play in collecting gender baseline information and in monitoring the fulfilment of women's strategic needs and any changes in relations that may result from the implementation and influence of the project.

3.3.3. *Governance and institutional arrangements*

Governance and institutional arrangements are critical vectors in the realisation of transboundary natural resources projects' impacts – yet often beyond their direct control. Regulations, legislation and policies, within and outside the environment and fishing sectors, have gender dimensions. Fisherwomen's access, use and benefits from local fisheries are influenced both directly and indirectly by fisheries management regulations (Di Ciommo and Schiavetti, 2012; Endemaño Walker and Robinson, 2009) and by policies such as those regulating fuel prices (Britwum, 2009). Evidence of explicit or indirect discrimination against men or women in the legislation governing natural resources use requires careful examination. Similarly, legislation and policies related to health and education, which are critical to women's participation and benefits should not be overlooked on the grounds that they are outside the remit of a natural resources project. When, on the other hand, the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of sex is enshrined in law (e.g. in Constitutional law, or an Anti-discrimination Act), projects need to capitalise on the basis this provides for furthering the position of women within an economic sector such as fisheries, and the broader society. Reciprocally, transboundary natural resources projects should use their influence to trigger the legal and regulatory amendments that may be necessary to support the implementation of their SAPs and of their intentions towards gender equality at national levels.

3.4. *Commitment to impact*

The need to strengthen the relationship between project intentions and transformative change amply justifies the request for adequate *budget allocations*, even if these are post-hoc. Earmarking specific funds to activities that address directly and indirectly gender issues is essential for effective mainstreaming throughout the implementation of SAPs. Such post-hoc allocations should reflect high-level support from project managers and their commitment to impact. Yet, gender mainstreaming and impact are often hampered by insufficient financial resources allocation (Risby and Todd, 2011). In the context of the BOBLME project, budget allocations for mainstreaming gender in the forthcoming phases of the project could focus on supporting:

- The implementation of SAP and in particular of NAPs activities at national/field levels that emphasise gender.
- The recruitment of the gender expertise needed to support the overall mainstreaming process.
- The monitoring of the gender mainstreaming process itself, through for example, the undertaking of a “gender-responsive budget analysis” both at the time of budget allocation (baseline) and at the end of the project, as part of a final evaluation of project's “gender value for money”.

Lack of tracking of gender-related expenditure is however a recurrent weakness in most donor-funded (non-gender specific) projects and programmes (Risby and Todd, 2011). Keeping track of how much ends up being spent on gender mainstreaming and activities involving gender issues at national

levels is important not only to ensure that sufficient funds are deployed to support gender-related activities in the project implementation, but also for the monitoring of the efficiency and impact of the mainstreaming process itself.

Human resources are needed for taking forward the gender agenda up to, and beyond, a project's end. Strengthening human capacity is therefore pivotal to widen both the spheres of influence of the project in terms of gender awareness and equality, and the actual impacts it aims to achieve. Aware and skilled personnel are needed to conduct gender analyses and to push forward a gender equality agenda throughout the project implementation, from design to monitoring and evaluation. Gender training is "a range of activities which seeks to inform, raise consciousness and equip different categories of persons with the skills to enable them to address gender inequalities in their work, their lives, and in society at large" (Acquaye-Baddoo and Tsikata, 2001, p. 61). Gender training, and more generally, awareness raising about gender issues, their importance and ways to tackle them, is therefore a key mechanism to make gender "everyone's business" and thus account for it in all project-related activities. Capacity building, which may eventually be broadened to include training about other aspects of relevance to the project, is a fundamental addition to the strategic outputs of the project. Yet, training should not be a panacea. To be effective, gender courses and awareness raising programmes need to be carefully crafted and tailored to the diverse levels of responsibility and needs of the target audience: awareness and sensitivity for government officials and NGOs, analysis at field level for local community organisations, or skills development for women (Warren, 2007). With regard to the latter for example, although capacity building schemes need to be tailored to prevailing cultural contexts, they should not fall short of challenging culturally engrained perceptions: women may be trained in non-traditional activities, e.g. swimming (Aguilar and Castañeda, 2001) or masonry (ENERGIA, 2010), provided the involvement strategies deployed enable the progressive overcoming of cultural barriers to their participation.

Similarly to any learning process, gender concepts will become more effectively "anchored" and translated into practice if courses are part of a longer-term capacity building programme on gender issues, instead of being delivered as a one off. If the turnover among staff and government officials is high, this will prevent the loss of newly-gained knowledge and "policy evaporation", i.e. the fact that projects' intentions, if not supported by high-level management actions, will "evaporate" before they reach the ground and bring about intended impacts (Derbyshire, 2002).

Although not a silver bullet, incentives and accountability requirements can be used to stimulate and further these efforts. Incentives for those (and their institutions) who attend training and incorporate gender in their work can be both tangible (e.g. pay level, promotion, and increased budgets) and intangible (e.g. professional recognition and institutional credibility) (Risby and Todd, 2011). They can also be used to attract and recruit female field workers in partner countries – in itself a way of promoting women's careers in a project. In this case, incentives can include non-financial advantages such as organisational flexibility and part-time employment possibilities to attract women applicants and retain them throughout the implementation of the project. Accountability mechanisms can be implemented as part of monitoring and evaluation; the mere fact of knowing that one is accountable for his/her actions and that a monitoring system of such actions is in place usually acts as a strong incentive for compliance.

Lastly, most natural resources management projects strive towards improvements in wellbeing as their ultimate objective. Yet the assumed relationship between environmental improvements and wellbeing is often neither direct nor causal (McShane et al., 2011; Dietz et al., 2009). A pathway to impact, i.e. an ex-ante analysis³ of the anticipated impacts of planned project actions, unpacks this relationship. In the context of a transboundary natural resources project such as the BOBLME project, it demonstrates how the environmental improvements stemming from the realisation of the main (environmentally-driven) objectives of the SAP would translate into welfare improvements amongst coastal populations. Identifying the long-term gender goal of the project and the assumptions behind it, mapping and connecting the preconditions or requirements necessary to achieve that goal, and

³ In this respect, a "pathway to impact" is different from a monitoring and evaluation plan which focuses on the ex-post evaluation of activities (see Section 4).

identifying the interventions that the project will perform to measure the desired change in gender relations would enable the elaboration of a *gender-sensitive pathway to impacts*. Not only relevant to the SAP, this would also underscore the project and its teams' commitment to transformative change, the very concept that underpins progress towards gender equality. Considerations over how the project SAP would translate into benefits at national levels could also guide the development of the NAPs, and thus ensure their alignment with the SAP (Cooke and Webster, 2009).

4. Monitoring and evaluation of gender mainstreaming and progress towards gender equality

To guide the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) process of gender mainstreaming in a natural resources project, the key question to ask is: how well is the project tackling and addressing gender issues in its design and implementation? The scorecard presented in Table 1 can be used to check how well a project is doing at this. It incorporates some quantitative indicators that can be used to refine the dichotomous response to each evaluative statement and enables to assess the extent to which the project results reflect its commitment to the principle gender equality (CIDA, 2010). Then, to monitor and evaluate the incremental progress contributed by the project towards gender equality at regional and national levels, the second question that will need answering is: to what extent do the project activities have improved the lives of coastal men and women and contributed to women's empowerment and gender equality?

Grounded in the Theory of Change, outcome mapping is an approach that can help answering these questions. Outcome mapping recognises complexity and a range of possible achievable outcomes through influence rather than control, and thus challenges the causal logic of traditional monitoring and evaluation systems. It does not focus on measuring deliverables and effects on primary beneficiaries but instead concentrates on behavioural change exhibited by secondary

Table 1

A gender mainstreaming scorecard for the BOBLME project. *Italic*: suggested quantitative indicators that need to be discussed by project teams.

Source: developed from Moser (2007).

1. BOBLME project commitments

- Gender issues are covered and adequately addressed in the SAP.
- A Gender Charter/Statement of political will is signed by all partner countries.
- A gender action plan (GAP) is included in each NAP.

2. Implementation mechanisms

- A specific budget line supports gender-related activities (GAP) in the implementation of the project at national level (*percentage – to be decided – of overall budget which is dedicated to gender-related activities*).
- National gender focal points are identified and involved in the oversight of project implementation at national level.

3. Internal (project) capacities

- All staff receive professional training on gender issues (*percentage – to be decided – of staff who has attended a yearly training course on gender*).
- Gender experts are recruited and regularly inputting into project and national level documents.

4. BOBLME project culture

- A balanced male/female ratio amongst project staff is established.
- All staff is sensitised to gender (*100% of staff has completed an online gender sensitization course, or similar*).
- Flexible work arrangements are considered to facilitate the involvement of women as project team members.

5. Accountability mechanisms

- Monitoring and evaluation of the project covers gender issues and behavioural changes towards greater gender equality.
 - Project staff performance appraisals incorporate questions related to the addressing of gender issues in their work.
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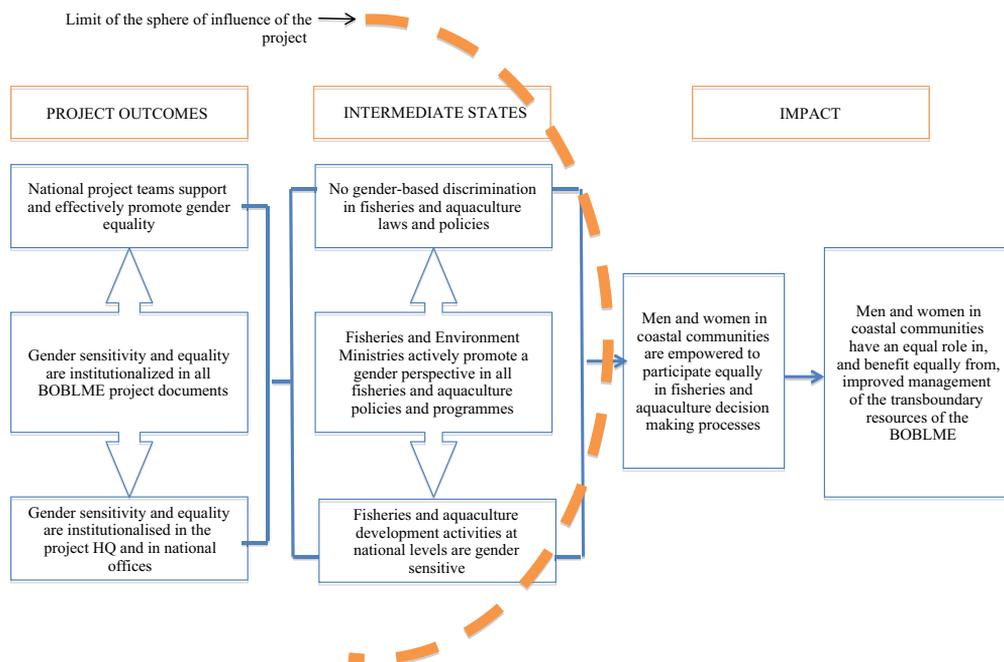


Fig. 1. From outcomes to impacts: the influence of gender mainstreaming in the BOBLME project.

Source: BOBLME (2012g) (adapted from Risby and Todd (2011) and Earl et al. (2001)). Outcomes, to which the project contributes, enhance the possibility of development impacts – but the relationship is not necessarily a direct one of cause and effect (ODI, 2009).

beneficiaries, in the belief that this will lead to long-term changes and positive outcomes beyond the actual life of the project (Earl et al., 2001). This approach was shown to have helped promoting evaluative thinking and a learning culture in projects and organisations (Smith et al., 2012). Gender-sensitive outcome mapping fits in the change process that gender mainstreaming raises. This is in the logical suite of the transformation that gender mainstreaming aims to achieve and in line with the need for flexibility in project implementation (Lentisco and Alonso, 2012).

Following the principles of the Theory of Change and Outcome Mapping, Fig. 1 describes the process by which the BOBLME project, and, for this matter, any other transboundary natural resources projects, could move from gender outcomes to impact, i.e. gender equality, through more effective mainstreaming of gender in its activities. Intermediary steps can be used as “progress markers”⁴ to monitor the uptake and effectiveness of the gender mainstreaming process. In the case of the BOBLME project, elaborating a gender-sensitive, outcome mapping-based monitoring and evaluation plan provides an ideal entry point for addressing simultaneously the need for a M&E system and the gender gap identified in the project documents (BOBLME, 2012g). To assist towards this end, Table 2 suggests generic types of gender-sensitive indicators that could be refined to monitor the impact of specific project activities on gender equality at national levels.

⁴ Progress markers describe the behavioural changes or actions the project would like the boundary partners to exhibit by the end of the project. They are classified as “expect-to-see” (realistic and immediate response visible during the project life), “like-to-see” (ideal responses expected by the end of the project) and “love-to-see” (idealistic to unrealistic responses that could happen beyond the life of the project, and which are beyond its “sphere of influence”, or control of the project) (Earl et al., 2001).

Table 2

Types of indicators for monitoring and evaluating the influence of the BOBLME project activities on progress towards gender equality.

Source: developed from UNEP (undated).

Types	Description	Benefits	Drawbacks	Examples
Checklist indicators	Ask whether something is or is not in place (the measure is a question of yes or no).	Good for monitoring processes and commitment. Simple and inexpensive data collection.	Lacks a quantitative aspect. Can be subject to interpretation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Are women as well as men participating in meetings? – Are both men and women targeted by field activities? – Are specific provisions made to account for women's lack of mobility or time? – etc. (in relation to the project activities)
Statistics-based indicators. Must be sex-disaggregated.	“Traditional” indicators describing a situation/ stage and measuring changes over time (in comparison to a baseline or previous measurements) using quantitative/statistical data.	Statistics may already be available from other sources (e.g. national statistics). Can be relatively simple to collect if a strict protocol is followed. Unlikely to suffer from bias.	Rarely provide a qualitative perspective. Need to refer to a <i>baseline</i> to assess changes over time.	<p>Male:Female ratio in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Employment (fishing, marketing, extension services...) – Participation in training, management meetings... – Capture, post-harvest, management activities – Health care access (can include incidence of water-related diseases) – etc. (in relation to the project activities)
Indicators requiring specific forms of data collection	Indicators that involve collecting qualitative data on judgments and perceptions, through sociological surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc. The information collected can then be quantitatively analysed and presented.	Very useful and insightful indicators, especially in the context of gender, to assess changes in attitudes as well as progress towards intended outcomes and impacts.	Requires a well-defined and replicable qualitative data collection and analysis methodology so that indicators can be compared over time. Needs to refer to a baseline. Often resource-intensive (time, money, human resources).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – % of coastal population that feels women should be primarily responsible for post-harvest activities? – % of extension services perceived as dispensing gender-biased information – % of women who feel empowered from partaking in fish-related activities

Table 2 (continued)

Types	Description	Benefits	Drawbacks	Examples
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - % of women and men who feel their decision making has changed following the implementation of the project - etc. (in relation to the project activities)

5. Conclusions

The focus of the BOBLME project is to address the transboundary environmental issues faced in the Bay of Bengal Large Marine Ecosystem. Yet, by committing to mainstreaming gender in its most strategic output (the SAP) and in the subsequent phases of its implementation (the NAPs), the project showed that it was also serious about contributing to women's empowerment and gender equality in the region. Despite the relatively advanced stage of elaboration of the project SAP and the consensual agreement that has been reached amongst the participating countries over its contents, a window of opportunity remains open to ensure that the project makes a difference in the lives of women and men it targets. The Theory of Change provides a compelling framework to do so and design gender mainstreaming actions in an ex-post manner. The elaboration of a gender-sensitive pathway to impacts and the development of human capacities ready to embrace the changes that mainstreaming gender in the project and its outputs require, need to be supported by strong political commitment and adequate budgetary allocations. A gender-sensitive pathway to impact would demonstrate such a commitment, as well as a thorough consideration of gender aspects by the project management and national teams. Similarly, gender-sensitive outcome mapping would be in line with the social transformation sought from the commitment to achieving gender equality. Thus, a M&E plan based on gender-sensitive outcome mapping was suggested as a second fundamental inclusion in the BOBLME project SAP. This is critical in the ex-post addressing of gender issues in the SAP itself and would consequently give the overall project a stronger "human" orientation. It would also be a progressive manner to capture, monitor and evaluate how project activities benefit men and women in coastal areas and lead to long-term cultural, social and economic changes.

The initial omission of gender issues in the project design was not unique to the BOBLME project. The overall approach suggested to the BOBLME to redress this oversight applies equally to the design, development and implementation of other transboundary natural resources projects. This paper should not however be seen as a blueprint on how to "add" gender to a project that has not tackled it adequately: gender issues should always be considered at the outset of project cycles. But the experience of the BOBLME project suggests that it is still possible, through the application of a gender "lens" on project documents, to find entry points for mainstreaming gender in project planning and implementation, as advanced as this process may be.

Among the entry points suggested, supporting gender training and capacity building at all levels, even beyond the life of a project is fundamental to ensure that gender mainstreaming becomes "everyone's business". This can however only effectively happen if mainstreaming works with the national frameworks and institutions in place, whilst simultaneously using its influence to effect change and progress towards gender equality.

The implementation of some of the steps proposed for gender mainstreaming may be more demanding than others. The development of a system to monitor and evaluate gender mainstreaming and gender impacts based on the Theory of Change requires an important shift in conceptual thinking, not only in terms of apprehension of gender issues, but also in terms of overall project design and

conceptualization of impacts. The BOBLME project could lead the way for other transboundary natural resources projects to follow suite.

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