

Implementing a Holistic Inclusion Approach (HIA) in Stabilization Programs



Cover image: Community members work hand-in-hand to enhance the education environment in Nasiriyah, Iraq. Image supplied by USAID Iraq Community Resilience Initiative-Ta'afi.

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Introduction

Chemonics' Holistic Inclusion Approach (HIA) comprehensively looks at the elements needed to integrate inclusion into stabilization programs, pairing them with practical and locally driven strategies to effect sustainable behavior change. HIA provides actionable steps that strengthen inclusion in management, operational systems, and programming. This is especially critical for stabilization programs implemented in politically and socially complex environments that rely heavily upon the knowledge and networks of local partners. The approach presents strategies to foster inclusion through internal practices, policies, and workplace culture. It also provides strategies to integrate gender equality and social inclusion (GESI) intentionally into activity design, partner engagement, implementation, and monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL).

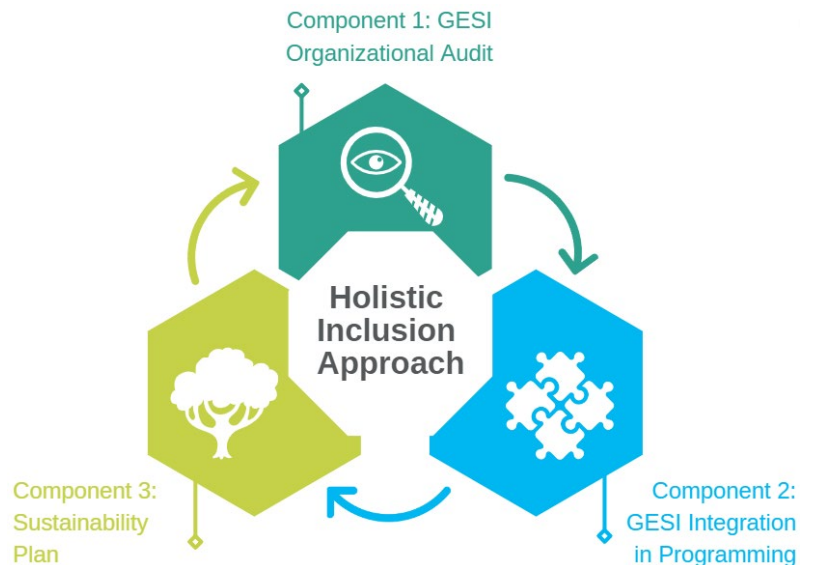


Exhibit 1: Three Components of the Holistic Inclusion Approach

HIA is divided into three components: 1) GESI Organizational Audit, 2) GESI Integration in Programming, and 3) a Sustainability Plan, to effectively carry forward key recommendations (see *Exhibit 1*). Some of the technical approaches in this methodology draw from and expand upon InterAction's gender audit tool for organizational self-assessment and transformation¹ and the International Labor Organization's participatory gender audit process and handbook.²

Component 1: GESI Organizational Audit

The goal of the GESI Organizational Audit (GESI Audit) is to work with program leadership and staff to identify staff competences relevant to GESI, as well as commitments and accountability measures for inclusion. Additionally, it aims to provide recommendations to foster an enabling environment that places diversity and inclusion at its center. The GESI Audit reviews the stages of the employee lifecycle, and includes an in-depth review of policies, procedures, and practices ranging from outreach and recruitment, benefits and reasonable accommodations, inclusive communications, reporting and accountability, ongoing mentorship and professional development, leadership, and promotion. In addition to desk research, the GESI Audit methodology includes an all-staff survey, individual interviews and focus group discussions, and all-staff trainings to foster and build a safe and inclusive workplace culture.

¹ For more information on InterAction's Gender Audit Tool Handbook [Gender-Audit-Handbook-2010-Copy.pdf \(interaction.org\)](#)

² For more information on the International Labor Organization's Participatory Gender Audit Handbook [A manual for gender audit facilitators: The ILO participatory gender audit methodology \(2nd Edition\)](#)

Component 2: GESI Integration in Programming

The goal of this activity is to integrate GESI intentionally into each stage of programming from the start; recognizing that GESI is integral to achieve program objectives. GESI integration into programming includes mainstreaming inclusion at each stage and integrating an iterative learning approach to assess the tangible impacts on the communities with whom we work. This ranges from concept development and stakeholder engagement, to MEL, outreach, and communications. Beyond communicating what needs to be done to integrate GESI at each stage, the purpose of this activity is to equip program staff with the knowledge to do this in practice – by providing them with a foundation of GESI knowledge, job aides, template revisions, workshops on unconscious bias, and practical tools to effectively integrate GESI in their work. GESI integration in programming is more effective when there is a culture of inclusion instilled among project staff, intrinsically interlinking components 1 and 2.

Component 3: Sustainability Plan

The goal of this activity is to provide an actionable plan to carry forward key recommendations from components 1 and 2 and to sustain GESI integration throughout the life of the program. Building on the first two components, the Sustainability Plan consists of a road map with holistic recommendations to set the team up for success. Recommendations may include staffing and management considerations, accountability and reporting mechanisms, programmatic adaptations, and feedback loops so the team is structured to flexibly update approaches based on lessons learned, and emergent needs. This component also integrates aspects of behavior change, such as a workplan and additional coaching and training support for the GESI focal points and/or GESI working group members mandated to carry forward key GESI recommendations.

Designing and Piloting HIA

The Holistic Inclusion Approach (HIA) methodology was developed in 2021 with the aim of integrating GESI systematically and intentionally into stabilization programs. HIA has been piloted in three Fragile and Conflict Affected Settings (FCAS) over a span of three years. It was first piloted in Iraq from November 2021 to January 2022, followed by Libya from January to March 2022, and is currently underway in Ukraine (April to May 2023). Below are some lessons learned from implementing HIA in Iraq and Libya, and how the process has led to systemic improvements and behavioral changes long after HIA was initiated.

Lessons from Iraq

Iraq has undergone significant political, social, and economic instability for decades, further exasperated by a number of military conflicts. This instability and the resulting social and political marginalization of communities has varied impacts on different groups, with some more disproportionately affected than others. Women, youth, persons with disabilities, and ethnoreligious groups in Iraq are becoming increasingly more vulnerable in the current context. Ta'afi is a program that aims to support an inclusive and prosperous Iraq by increasing community engagement when identifying and implementing local solutions. A critical measure of success for the program is the ability to empower different voices within the various communities, stakeholders, and program staff. Inclusion is not only a single result indicator, but a critical programming approach that needs to be approached holistically.

When HIA was piloted in Iraq, all three HIA components (the GESI Organizational Audit, GESI Integration in Programming, and Sustainability Plan) were equally impactful due to the Ta'afi team's time and dedication to participate in and build on the entire process. They began by looking inwards, to identify areas for organizational improvement and commitments to GESI principles, and

then applied similar principles and inclusive practices in programmatic processes and engagement with partners.

Internal Successes

The GESI Organizational Audit was a useful exercise for the team because it offered a snapshot of key areas of strength, as well as priority issues to improve inclusive policies and practices within the program. It provided a platform for staff to share their diverse perspectives and various strategies to strengthen inclusion. Findings from the GESI Organizational Audit (Component 1) were then used to create a roadmap and a Sustainability Plan (Component 3) to address the identified key issues. It led to the creation of a GESI advisory group – representing diverse genders, backgrounds, and technical specialties from across the program – to promote and guide the long-term holistic integration of GESI across the program. This group established various mechanisms for staff to raise concerns and to discuss them in a safe and non-judgmental space, including a feedback mechanism box and an online tool for staff to submit questions or concerns anonymously, from the safety of their home. The advisory group also began providing GESI orientations for all new staff during the onboarding process to ensure a foundational knowledge of GESI and an understanding of program values and resources from the start. As a result of this group’s ongoing advocacy efforts with staff and management, several important changes have taken place, including the creation of job promotion guidelines for each position, improvements in the human resources manual, expansion of sick leave benefits beyond local labor law to include dependents, and the creation of an internship program.

Inclusive Community-based Impacts

Using HIA, Ta’afi integrated inclusivity into its strategic framework to ensure it is embedded in the way staff define their overall goal and implement regional approaches. By doing this, the team was incentivized to more intentionally analyze the local context to understand differential GESI impacts, feeding into design activities that were responsive to the needs of specific marginalized groups. The GESI advisory group played a critical role in convening the diverse perspectives within the program (i.e., staff responsible for activity design, procurement, MEL, etc.) and to integrate GESI at different key points along the activity cycle. For example, the MEL team developed GESI sensitive indicators and strategies to target harder to reach communities in data collection and adapted learning processes to better measure progress towards inclusion, ensuring accountability to this at each stage of programming.

The unconscious bias training and guided program discussions encouraged staff to reflect on existing assumptions. This led staff to challenge their practices to mitigate their biases through more intentional outreach and communication with diverse, harder to reach communities and through internal reflection and discussions on inclusion. GESI advisory group members became champions for inclusion within their respective teams, driving forward more inclusive practices. As a result of these combined efforts, GESI considerations became a natural point of discussion at both the strategic and activity levels, as evidenced by the following:

- *Engaging women and girls:* Ta’afi regularly holds public events to engage the community as part of its efforts to promote inclusive civic action. In some conservative communities in Iraq, public events can be less accessible to women and girls. In response, the program has partnered with women-led organizations that have the understanding, experience, and network to facilitate women and girls’ access to engage in public activities, which is especially effective in conservative cities. Where women-led organizations are not available, the program collaborates with partners to find ways to ensure more inclusive participation and reach women where they are. For example, one partner utilized a digital platform – accepting online registrations for a marathon, as it makes it easier for women to register

instead of an in-person visit. This enabled diverse ethnoreligious women from the Yazidi, Christian, Sunni, Shia, Arab, Kurds, and Turkmen communities to participate in the race.

- *Inclusion of religious and ethnic minorities:* When designing activities, the program considers the ethnic and religious makeup of the community to ensure all groups are included. To achieve this, Ta'afi engages a variety of community leaders to gain insight and better understand their unique needs and trust within their community. For example, community leaders from Iraq's different religious and ethnic groups were engaged in an activity to support a local museum celebrating Iraq's diverse cultural traditions. Under another activity, the program supported a cultural market, and the ethnic and religious makeup of the community was considered when selecting vendors to ensure all groups were represented.
- *Accessibility:* To ensure the program activities are accessible, they are designed to consider diverse abilities to facilitate community member participation in activity events. For example, community centers, schools, and parks were rehabilitated by the program to consider accessibility in design and include accommodations for people with disabilities. In addition, Ta'afi is rehabilitating a community hall where the new design (i.e., ramps, wider doors, accessible lavatories), will allow individuals with mobility challenges greater access.
- *Survivors of gender-based violence:* As a result of the HIA process, Ta'afi became more aware and sensitive to the needs of GBV survivors. The program is currently implementing activities that support women and girls that were kidnapped by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. These activities include supporting the Government of Iraq to establish the General Directorate of Survivor Affairs, which provides services to this group. Assistance is focused on ensuring survivors are aware of their rights and able to access the services of the directorate, and ensuring directorate staff have the knowledge and skills to appropriately refer these survivors to support services.

Lessons from Libya

Gender norms and perceptions vary across Libya. For example, the west and east are considered more gender and socially inclusive, while the center and south are characterized as more conservative, with stronger tribal traditions that influence gender norms. Thus, some regions allow for more transformative activities that address underlying power dynamics, while others require accommodating measures to mitigate security risks for certain social groups. For instance, in some communities in Libya, it is unacceptable for women to travel alone between cities without a male companion. This requires advanced consideration, coordination, and resources to accommodate for the additional travel costs. Restricted movement is an example of the gender norms within a community that can be barriers for some women to serve in community-facing roles, such as procurement. Where cultural norms may seem at odds with some aspects of gender equality practices, it is important for donor-funded stabilization programs to be flexible and considerate about GESI integration in the activity cycle and incorporate a thorough risk analysis and mitigation strategy to reduce the potential for negative and harmful consequences.

Many regions in Libya are tribally diverse, with historical grievances and patterns of political and social division. This adds another layer of complexity, as tribal affiliations and equitable representation is another critical consideration that impacts the success of an activity and well-being of a local community. With regards to supporting people with disabilities, while there is a national legal framework, it is not reflected in practice and in many regions people with disabilities and their needs are largely invisible. Due to the varying social and cultural norms within Libya,

stabilization programs such as the Libya Transition Initiative 4 (LTI4) require a highly tailored and locally contextualized approach to integrate effective GESI activities across all elements of the program.

Internal Successes

While all three HIA components were useful, the GESI Organizational Audit (Component 1) and the all-staff anonymous survey proved to be the most impactful in Libya. The all-staff survey measured political will, technical capacity, and accountability to inclusion, and the results were disaggregated by gender and region. The survey offered a mechanism for staff to anonymously share perspectives and experiences and propose solutions. This provided LTI4 leadership with recommendations to foster greater inclusion within the team by building on specific approaches that have been working and introduce entirely new methods. One positive aspect expressed by female staff during the GESI organizational audit was regarding Chemonics' investment in its employees; whereby it is one of the few organizations in the local community that provides opportunities for women to grow professionally. Staff expressed that this was made possible by investing in their technical skills and promoting qualified candidates into senior leadership roles. Gender balance and representation continues to be a priority among the senior leadership team. As the program director in Libya is a woman, this continues to enable the program to break barriers for engagement with local and national actors.

Interactive staff workshops, including the GESI introductory course and scenario-based unconscious bias training, were extremely useful and valuable. The unconscious bias training proved to be the most effective as it allowed staff to reflect on their own thought processes. Reflections discussed during these sessions led to more inclusive recruitment, procurement, and grants practices, even in more conservative and traditional contexts such as in the south. As part of the Sustainability Plan (Component 3), LTI4 has identified a GESI focal point to serve as a resource, and the program continues to implement recommendations from the audit to improve policies and inclusive practices from the earliest stages of recruitment throughout the employee lifecycle.

Inclusive Community-based Impact

During the implementation of the HIA, program staff reflected on how unconscious bias impacts programming decisions, especially when there is pressure to move quickly to respond to donor and community needs. The human mind takes cognitive shortcuts to help make decisions more effectively, which can lead to implicit biases and assumptions about others, including partners and activities. This training emphasized that the first step is to be more aware of unconscious bias, followed by taking tangible steps to mitigate these to be more intentional about designing and delivering inclusive activities. With the goal of being more GESI aware and responsive at each stage of programming, the deputy chief of party developed a one-pager job aide that outlines key GESI considerations at each step – from activity concept, design, implementation, completion, and closeout. This can be used by staff to be more targeted and intentional about inclusion. These combined efforts have led to more inclusive impacts in the communities across Libya, as evidenced by the following activities:

- *Planning and budgeting for safety and inclusion.* Designing inclusive and safe activities in Libya requires additional resources and preparation from the start. As Libya is politically volatile, and the security situation considered fragile, LTI4 coordinates with security institutions to ensure the safety of all participants. In two activities in the southern region, where gender norms are more conservative, partners coordinated with the internal security apparatus and ensured both male and female security personnel were assigned to protect participants; female participants noted how this provided them with a greater sense of security. Further, as part of activity preparation, security assessments at venues were carried

out, and regional teams conducted pre-risk hotel assessments to ensure they are appropriate for male and female participants, as well as people with disabilities. For example, in the hotel procurement selection process, LTI4 included criteria to assess the accessibility of the venue to accommodate people with disabilities to facilitate their participation. Finally, LTI4's activity budgets are designed to promote the safety and inclusion of all stakeholders and participants. For example, activity budgets include costs for Mahrams, or a traveler companion for female participants, so they can travel comfortably in the current environment. This also includes safe accommodations, which are necessary for women to participate.

- *Designing infrastructure for greater accessibility and safety.* LTI4 applies universal design principles and conducts participatory consultations in the design of public spaces and renovations. In one activity in the south, LTI4 hired a qualified female architect to design a community park that incorporates the needs of men, women, and families. While developing the design, the architect interviewed diverse women and men from the neighborhood to determine their needs, and perspectives, on how best to design a park that families can safely use. The architect listened to their concerns – and fears – and integrated mitigation measures into the design, taking into account universal design principles. In another activity in which LTI4 was rehabilitating a school, the engineer conducted several meetings with the school principal and teachers to better understand their different needs. The school had mixed gender toilets that did not offer privacy for boys and girls, which limited girls' attendance at school. In response, LTI4 provided separated prefabricated lavatories for girls to ensure their privacy. In addition, the project refurbished a breakroom for female teachers who did not feel comfortable spending recess hours in mixed gender rooms.
- *Intentional inclusion to promote women's empowerment and social cohesion.* A strategic approach on LTI4 is to convene Libyans from diverse backgrounds over common interests to reduce division and polarization and promote unification. When designing activities, LTI4 program staff intentionally select participants who represent diverse gender identities, ages, tribal affiliations, and abilities. For example, an activity in southern Libya is using regional pride to break down barriers and restore trust and interaction between rival tribes, build stronger concepts of regional identity, and promote peaceful coexistence to challenge the current divisive narrative. As part of this activity, more than 20 social media influencers (e.g., artists, bloggers, content creators) covered a 3-day cultural awareness event to shine a light on the region and bring a sense of pride to parties, mixing men and women from different tribes who would not otherwise join the event together due to gender and social norms. LTI4 intentionally selected diverse female influencers to counter the stigma around women's participation and visibility in the south. In another activity, LTI4 partnered with a women-led civil society organization (CSO) that promotes women and youth empowerment and social reconciliation. LTI4 supported the CSO to conduct social after-school activities for elementary school students coming from different communities and opposed tribes. The participating children were intentionally assigned to teams mixing members from different tribes. This also resulted in parents of these children positively interacting with one another during the implementation of the after-school activity.



A run for peace and inclusion - A local CSO in Libya organized a women focused group discussion on political participation in addition to a women's race in support of reconciliation. Image supplied by USAID Libya Transition Initiative 4.



Warjin media team, a community-focused platform, amplifies the diverse voices and stories of all Sinjar communities, fostering understanding and unity. Image supplied by USAID Iraq Community Resilience Initiative-Ta'afi.