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Gender mainstreaming in sustainable land and water management: Insights from the Lake Victoria Basin

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Abstract

Gender mainstreaming is crucial for sustainable development, particularly in complex regions like the Lake Victoria Basin (LVB), where gender disparities intersect with land and water resource management challenges. Despite the existence of national gender mainstreaming legal and policy frameworks in the LVB, there remains a gap in understanding their operationalisation, implementation, and effectiveness at the organisational level. In this diagnostic study, we assess gender mainstreaming efforts among selected land and water management organisations in the LVB, specifically Kenya and Uganda in East Africa. We also investigate barriers and enabling factors to successfully implement organisational gender strategies. We collected data from a sample of 32 purposefully selected organisations, representing various sectors including local non-governmental organisations, government departments, research institutions, civil society organisations, academia, international institutions, and the private sector. A questionnaire was used as the tool for data collection. Findings reveal varying levels of gender mainstreaming among the selected organisations. Organisations with a completed and implemented gender strategy (n=22) attribute their achievement to leadership support, cultivation of staff ownership, and understanding of gender through regular gender training and hiring designated gender focal persons to advise and guide the gender mainstreaming process. Consequently, the impact was improved scaling and greater staff engagement. Conversely, barriers to developing and implementing gender strategies include unfamiliarity with gender issues, insufficient financial and human resources to invest in gender, and competing priorities. Recommendations to improve gender mainstreaming efforts in the LVB include harmonising gender mainstreaming policies at the regional level (East African Community), enhancing capacity building in gender across sectors, and involvement of men, women, and youth in promoting gender equality. Our observation of inadequate implementation of gender strategies provides evidence of the need for a more coordinated approach in gender mainstreaming efforts in the Lake Victoria Basin. This approach should emphasise strong leadership and commitment, inclusivity, designated gender focal persons, intentional resource allocation for capacity building, and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms.

Keywords: East Africa, organisational strategies, sustainable land and water management