INCLUSIVE SYSTEMIC EVALUATION FOR GENDER EQUALITY, ENVIRONMENTS AND MARGINALIZED VOICES

ISE4GEMs: A new approach for the SDG era
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ISE4GEMs

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A new approach for the SDG era

by Anne Stephens, Ellen Lewis and Shravanti Reddy
The authors would like to thank our esteemed colleagues below for having acted as members of our Advisory Group and our peer reviewers of an earlier draft of this guide. Their comments have been incredibly useful in helping focus and sharpen its content. Any responsibility for shortcomings, factual errors or misinterpretation rests solely with the authors.

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Systems thinking is an innovative approach that can expand our awareness of global challenges to better respond to the circular nature of the world we live in. Global development is now recognised by the 2030 Agenda as being characterised by multiple interconnected and indivisible realities as expressed in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With this understanding there is a need to think and act beyond one area of expertise or mandate to understand how the actions of our work contribute to the SDG goals and objectives. Systems thinking can help us in this endeavour.

With SDGs in mind, the UN Women Independent Evaluation Service initiated the development of a new evaluation approach entitled, Inclusive Systemic Evaluation for Gender equality, Environments and Marginalized voices (ISE4GEMs). The Guide is underpinned by inclusive systemic thinking and organises evaluative practice to capture the intersectional linkages that shape the lives of human and environmental systems.

This publication was developed with support from the Australian Government’s Endeavour Fellowship programme; James Cook University, Australia, and the Centre for Systems Studies at the University of Hull in the United Kingdom.

This Guide is meant to facilitate evaluation practitioners in applying the ISE4GEMs approach by providing both concept and practical tools. I encourage practitioners and learners alike to use this Guide to further strengthen their knowledge on systemic thinking and to use it to conduct inclusive evaluations.

Finally, I would like to thank the co-authors of the approach and this guide for this timely contribution to evaluation.

Sincerely,

Verasak Liengsririwat
Director a.i, Independent Evaluation and Audit Services
At present, there are significant changes underway in terms of our external world. Climate change has contributed to creating very real environmental, humanitarian and security crises, with more of the same expected in years to come. Economic and social policies are contributing to increasing inequalities, including gender inequalities, leaving some of the most vulnerable groups behind. The rapid advance of information and communications technologies are also creating both new opportunities as well as risks and challenges. These are just a few of many concurrent and overlapping changes happening at the global level, with other changes happening specific to regions, countries, communities and individuals.

The change and the complexity of the contexts within which we work is not new. These changes are part of a continuum that has likely existed since the beginning of time. What is new is our improved understanding of how this complexity may complicate those things that we have long considered to be more straightforward than they actually are—including international development interventions.

The practice of evaluation is also ever evolving to improve quality and relevance in response to the changes in our external world to meet the demand for new learning, thinking and understanding. Inclusive Systemic Evaluation for Gender Equality, Environments and Marginalized Voices (hereon referred to as ISE4GEMs) is being introduced in this document as a new evaluation approach that hopes to contribute to this ongoing evolution. It puts forward an innovative systemic evaluation practice that addresses complexity and prioritizes issues within these three pressing domains for sustainable development: gender equality, environments and marginalized voices (GEMs).

Part A of this document introduces the theoretical concepts that underpin the ISE4GEMs. Practitioners will be best able to understand and apply the approach if they have a basic understanding of these key concepts. Chapter 1 presents ISE4GEMs and some ideas of when and how it might be used. Chapter 2 introduces the core concepts of systems thinking: interrelationships, perspectives and boundaries. Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the three intersectional dimensions prioritized through the GEMs framework. Chapter 4 brings systemic evaluation practice and intersectional analysis with the other elements (systemic theory of change [SToC], ethics, validity and rigour, participatory and transdisciplinary methods, and capacity development) that together define the ISE4GEMs approach.

Part B provides hands-on guidance and tools for practitioners to adapt and implement the ISE4GEMs approach. Chapter 5 covers planning, design and the development of the Boundary Story. Chapter 6 focuses on how to conduct an evaluation deploying transdisciplinary methods for data collection and ethical safeguards. Chapter 7 advises...
on how to conduct systemic triangulation to arrive at evaluation results and develop an SToC. Chapter 8 includes an overview of the capacity development opportunities throughout the evaluation process for social change, as well as suggests some relevant communication and dissemination methods.

The publication concludes with an Authors’ Afterword, followed by Annexes that include a glossary of key terms, the full set of tools referred to in Part B, and a complete reference list.

Last, but not least, the process to develop this approach and guide has been a profound and enjoyable professional and personal experience. We wish to thank our Advisory Group, peer reviewers, family and friends who have enthusiastically supported our efforts and provided sage advice and guidance throughout the process, adding to the richness of our combined learning experience. This guidance is not able to be comprehensive given the complexity of achieving sustainable development. We see this ISE4GEMs guide as a beginning and plan to continue to use and learn from this approach to further deepen our understanding of how to be part of, and contribute to, building a world that works for everyone.
OVERVIEW OF CONTENTS

PART A. ISE4GEMS PRACTITIONER THEORY

- Introduction
- Systems thinking
- The GEMs framework
- ISE4GEMs approach and the SToC

PART B. ISE4GEMS PRACTITIONER GUIDANCE

- PHASE I: Evaluation preparation
- PHASE II: Data collection
- PHASE III: Data analysis and reporting
- PHASE IV: Capacity development

GLOSSARY

ISE4GEMS TOOLS

REFERENCES
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreword</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author's Prologue</td>
<td>VI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of contents</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Exhibits</td>
<td>XIV</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acronyms and abbreviations</td>
<td>XVI</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## PART A. ISE4GEMS PRACTITIONER THEORY  

### CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION  

ISE4GEMs  

When and how to use the ISE4GEMs  

### CHAPTER 2. SYSTEMS THINKING  

What is complexity?  

Key concepts for navigating complexity  

- Uncertainty  
- Emergence  
- Feedback  
- Intersectionality  

Traditional approaches to addressing intervention complexity  

What is systems thinking?  

- Interrelationships  
- Perspectives  

Systems boundaries, boundary analysis and reflection  

- Boundary analysis  
- Boundary reflection  

Systematic thinking and systemic thinking: What is the difference?
CHAPTER 3. THE GEMS FRAMEWORK

Intersectionality and the GEMs dimensions
- Gender equality
- Environments
- Marginalized voices

The GEMs framework

Key takeaways

CHAPTER 4. ISE4GEMS APPROACH AND THE STOC

Feedback to systems and an SToC

Key Elements of ISE4GEMs
- Ethics
- Validity and rigour
- Transdisciplinary mixed methods
- Capacity development
- Attributes and competencies of a thought partner

Key takeaways

PART B. ISE4GEMS PRACTITIONER GUIDANCE

CHAPTER 5. PHASE I—PREPARATION AND DESIGN

Step 1: Identify the intervention as a system: The Boundary Story
- First-order boundary analysis
- Stakeholder analysis
- Drafting the Boundary Story
### Step 2: Define the evaluation boundary

- Define the ideal boundary of the evaluation
- Define the actual boundary of the evaluation
- Vulnerability assessment
- Evaluability assessment
- Develop the evaluation design document

### Step 3: ISE4GEMs design and planning considerations

- Purpose, objectives and use/users
- Criteria and questions
- Evaluation indicators
- Selection of data collection methods and alternative methods
- Data sources, stakeholders and data management plan and identified ethical risks and safeguards
- Data analysis & interpretation methods for systemic triangulation
- Capacity development and knowledge sharing
- Timeline and resources

### Selection of evaluators

### SDG Relevance

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**CHAPTER 6. PHASE II—DATA COLLECTION**

### Step 1: First data collection cycle: remote-based data collection

- Check your boundaries
- Remote data collection
- Data audit of first cycle

### Step 2: Second data collection cycle: Field-based collection

- Check your boundaries, again
- Local Boundary Stories for multi-site interventions
- In the field: First briefing meeting
- Deploying data collection methods
- Emergent sources of information
- Data audit of second cycle
CHAPTER 7. PHASE III—DATA ANALYSIS, INTERPRETATION AND REPORTING

Systemic triangulation for ISE4GEMs

Concept 1: Facts as findings and evidence of changes

- Reviewing the data analysis methods
- GEMs data extraction
- Gender equality themes
- Environmental themes
- Marginalized voices themes
- GEMs data analysis
- Integrating the GEMs themes
- Converting themes to findings statements

Concept 2: Values as perspectives on the meaning of changes

- Participatory data interpretation workshop

Concept 3: Interpretation of the meaning of change within a specific boundary

- Developing an SToC
- Developing the final Boundary Story

Report writing, conclusions and recommendations

- Reflections on the validity of the ISE4GEMs

CHAPTER 8. PHASE IV—CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

Opportunities for Capacity Development

Dissemination and Communications Methods

Final practitioners’ reflections

AFTERWORD FROM THE AUTHORS
Glossary 143

ISE4GEMs Tools 151

Tool 1: First-order boundary analysis 152
Tool 2: Stakeholder analysis 154
Tool 3: Second-order boundary analysis 159
Tool 4: Vulnerability assessment 161
Tool 5: GEMs evaluability assessment 163
Tool 6: ISE4GEMs planning tool 165
Tool 7: Transdisciplinary methods and tools 167
Tool 8: Facilitators’ field guide meeting planner 177
Tool 9: GEMs data analysis 178
Tool 10: GEMs integration tool 181
Tool 11: Final reflections 182

References 183
LIST OF EXHIBITS

TABLES
Table 2.1 Characteristics of systematic thinking and systemic thinking 23
Table 2.2 Characteristics of systematic action for expert and thought partner 25
Table 5.1 Illustrative questions from Tool 1: First-order boundary analysis 41
Table 5.2 How to use Tool 4: Vulnerability assessment 70
Table 5.3 ISE4GEMs design principles 74
Table 7.1 A culture checklist 128
Table 8.1 Quick guide to key capacity development opportunities in Chapters 5 through 7 135
Table 8.2 Strategies for knowledge sharing 138

FIGURES
Figure 1.1 The interconnectedness of the Sustainable Development Goals 4
Figure 1.2 The ISE4GEMs process 7
Figure 2.1 A visual representation of an intersectionality 16
Figure 2.2 UN Women boundaries 20
Figure 3.1 A visual representation of an intersectional situation 37
Figure 3.2 The interconnected GEMs dimensions 38
Figure 4.1 The ISE4GEMs approach 42
Figure B.1 The ISE4GEMs learning and action cycles 55
Figure B.2 Stages of the ISE4GEMs 56
Figure 5.1 The ISE4GEMs learning and action cycles—Phase I 58
Figure 5.2 The Boundary Story of the intervention 59
Figure 5.3 Determining the ideal boundary of the evaluation 67
Figure 5.4 The ideal boundary of the evaluation 67
Figure 5.5 The actual boundary of the evaluation 68
Figure 6.1 Inclusive systemic evaluation action cycles—Phase II 90
Figure 6.2 Local Boundary Stories in one intervention 98
Figure 7.1 Inclusive systemic evaluation action cycles—Phase III 109
Figure 7.2 Systemic triangulation for transformational change 110
Figure 7.3 GEMs integration diagram (Example: indigenous training and employment) 119
Figure 8.1 Inclusive systemic evaluation action cycles—Phase IV 134
 BOXES

Box 2.1  Tips from the field: Appreciate, learn and listen 14
Box 2.2  Tips from the field: Emphasizing the narrative 21
Box 3.1  Tips from the field: Identifying linkages 34
Box 3.2  Tips from the field: Beneficiaries as programme leaders 36
Box 4.1  Potential harms 45
Box 5.1  Potential stakeholders 42
Box 5.2  Tips from the field: Establishing criteria 77
Box 5.3  Considering new technology-based methods 81
Box 5.4  Tips from the Field: Expand the application of ethics to also include local and indigenous knowledge 82
Box 5.5  Tips from the Field: Facilitation skills 88
Box 5.6  Skill sets required for an evaluation using the ISE4GEMs approach 87
Box 6.1  Tips from the Field: Practitioner and community reflection–A joint endeavor 94
Box 6.2  Tips from the field: Breaking visits into phases 101
Box 6.3  What if you can’t conduct a field visit? 102
Box 6.4  Tips from the field: Gathering data 104
Box 7.1  Tips from the field: Rechecking your data 116
Box 7.2  Tips from the field: Coding data for GEMs themes 117
Box 7.3  Tips from the field: Using Tool 9 for GEMs data analysis 118
Box 8.1  Communicating evaluation results by conceptualizing systems change using the forest ecocycle analogy 140