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Título de la ponencia: *Gender mainstreaming, empowerment and access to water*¹

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Resumen:

Water is an essential element for life. It affects our lives globally and is embedded in our culture. Access to safe and sufficient water is a universal human right but for a large part of the world population this right still has to be ensured. Many people, especially the poor, are left out of this facility, denying them a healthy life, food security and economic welfare.

All people use water but different users have different interests and benefits with regard to availability, use and management of water. This depends on sex, age, socio-economic class, ethnicity, religion, etc. Women are the main water users as managers of the household, caretakers of the family and women farmers. Yet their crucial responsibilities, interests and contributions to the water sector are hardly recognised, let alone taken into consideration by the predominantly male water professionals while planning and implementing water projects.

Worldwide data have shown that management of water resources is more sustainable, effective, efficient and equitable when gender dimensions are taken into account in the consultation process as well as in the management and implementation of water-related services. This ultimately results in poverty reduction and a lower incidence of water-borne diseases.

A further explanation of gender concepts and empowerment is given in the paper along with examples of lessons learned and good practices with gender mainstreaming in the water sector.

Palabras clave: Gender, empowerment, water and food production, hygiene and sanitation, and water for nature.

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Introduction

Water is an essential element for life. It affects our lives globally and is embedded in our culture. The Gender and Water Alliance among others believes that equitable access to and control of water is a basic right for all as well as a critical factor in poverty reduction, food security, health, agriculture, industry, a sustainable eco-system, and gender and social equality.

Lack of access to safe and sufficient water causes the death of five million people worldwide every year, mostly children. Reasons for this big problem are an increase in competition for water resources and acceleration of water pollution worldwide. Increasing water scarcity and declining water quality have negative impacts on development, particularly for vulnerable groups such as rural people. Poor rural women whose access and control of water is the base of their livelihood are especially affected.

It is now recognised that, to secure livelihoods, strong economies and sustainable ecological systems depend on the availability of water. Internationally there is consensus on the principles for water management. The urgent challenge still remaining is to translate these principles into practice. This must take into account that the main cause behind this global water crisis is a crisis of governance and gender inequality.

Women and men have distinctive tasks and responsibilities with respect to water resources at domestic and productive levels and in relation to the environment. Also, the relationship of women with water is different from that of men. Access to water is different and generally unequal for women as is decision-making in water management.

The poorest, women and men, have the greatest disadvantage in terms of access, use, management and control of water resources. Among them women are in an even more disadvantageous position.

At the same time, lack of access to water and its declining quality worsens poverty conditions due to diseases caused. This in turn results in additional work and less time available for other income-generating activities or for relaxation and leisure. And so this becomes a vicious circle of poverty-lack of water-greater poverty.

International conferences since the 90's have repeatedly highlighted the importance of increasing and strengthening the effective participation of women in all water-related development initiatives to capitalise on their knowledge and skills as water managers and decision makers. This recognition is reflected in the objectives of the United Nations Decade "Water for Life".

Remarkably, while the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide the focus for almost all national and international development initiatives they do not mention gender equality with regard to water specifically. This issue deserves particular concern because the need to adopt a sensitive gender approach and analysis at national and local levels of implementation and its implication is generally not well understood. As a consequence, such a sensitive approach is not applied adequately in integrated and sustainable water management.

Target 10 of MDGoal 7 calls for a 50% reduction of the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation by 2015. This global concern increased the awareness of the need to improve water and sanitation services to achieve the other poverty reduction, education and health goals. Now it is widely acknowledged that investments in water, sanitation and hygiene are necessary if the MDGs are to be achieved.

Yet, till date very few countries have recognised the importance of including water issues in national policies to reduce poverty. If at all they have come up in some document, like the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs), gender equality considerations are often left out. In many cases, the focus of water management is primarily on technological solutions that often ignore social realities.

Therefore it is necessary to bridge the gaps between 'domestic', 'productive' and 'environmental' water sub-sectors, considering and managing these different water uses in relation to each other. This will help professional staff understand how social factors affect water resource management and how to include social context in policies and plans.

Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is a way to bridge these gaps taking all different water needs equally seriously and relating them to each other. In practice this is often difficult because of a sectoral approach in which responsibilities are divided and coordination is avoided.

IWRM aims at ensuring a coordinated development of water, land and related resources to optimise economic and social welfare without compromising on the sustainability of environmental systems.

The key principles of this approach are:

- i) Water should be treated as an economic, social, and environmental good
- ii) Water policies should focus on the management of water as a whole and not just on the provision of water
- iii) Governments should facilitate and enable sustainable development of water resources by providing integrated water policies and regulatory frameworks
- iv) Water resources should be managed at the lowest appropriate level
- v) Women and men should be recognised as central actors in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.

All people use water but different users have different interests and benefits with respect to the availability, use and management of water, depending on sex, age, socio-economic class, ethnicity, religion, etc. These different interests, needs, practices and knowledge levels need to be taken into account, responded to and tapped. (GWA and UNDP, 2006)

Gender

‘Gender’ is not synonymous with ‘women’.

It has to do with women and men and their interdependent relations, with asymmetric power differences and hierarchy, and with differences in access and participation with respect to decision-making and resources. It refers to the different tasks, rights, skills and responsibilities of women and men, and the way their qualities, actions and identities are determined by the process of socialisation. The different positions of women and men in a certain society are influenced by historical, religious, economic and cultural realities.

In other words, gender is the difference between women and men in the same household and within and between cultures. It is a socially and culturally constructed concept. The interdependence of relationships and responsibilities may change over time, and indeed is changing, as a result of a deliberate, planned route or simply as indefinable results of undeterminable forces.

Gender relations, then, change over time and respond to the introduction of new technologies and ways of working. While technology is often seen as gender neutral experience shows that technology does alter existing gender tasks and responsibilities and often favours men. Women and those marginalised by caste, class or poverty may lose the assets they controlled before new technologies were introduced. Therefore attention has to be paid to how technology may meet the needs of those it is meant for, ensuring it does not have negative impacts by reinforcing or extending gender inequalities (Coles and Wallace, 2005).

GWA uses a broad interpretation of the term ‘gender’. It recognises the existing diversity that includes power relations based on socio-economic differences and variable factors like age, race, religion, socio-economic class, ethnicity, urban or rural location, ability/disability and indigenous status.

For example, age differences greatly influence the position of a person. In Spanish contexts, as in many other, older women will have a large say in what younger women of the household should do or not. Boys and girls are brought up differently. Relations between them and those between them and elders are also considered gender relations. Further, men and women have different responsibilities at home but also in the village or community (Muylwijk, 2006).

Finally, when we use the concept of gender relations we do not forget the differences among women and those among men themselves.

Gender has a different form in different cultures and places. It also changes over time. Like culture, gender is dynamic: if people want to change their own culture, it will change. And so, the key word for gender in relation to development is change. As perceptions and societies change along with our values, gender relations change. A gender-sensitive approach should, therefore, contradict the notion that situations of inequality are culturally determined and cannot change. The example in the box below may give a clear illustration of the dynamic process of culture, hence of gender equations.

In every society, culture and context, ideas exist on how men and women should behave, that too with respect to a certain position or age. This is called ‘gender ideology’.

Every person by his or her upbringing learns how to behave. This does not mean people actually behave like that. Women, like men, know what they are supposed to do. Even if they would prefer to live in more equality it is difficult to put aside the division of tasks learnt from childhood.

Gender ideology is an internalised attitude, often seen as natural and prescribed by religion, and differs per culture. We are hardly aware of it. It is a set of usually unwritten rules we stick to, even if we try to change. In development efforts, gender ideology does not only play a big role with the beneficiaries, it is also part of the thinking of professionals, of those who develop programmes for better water management, be it for food, people or the environment.

To change gender ideology per se is difficult but not impossible. We can see many examples of how it can work. Rules, however strongly tied or imbedded in a certain culture or context, may always break, change or get overruled.

To change gender ideology regarding taboos, however, will prove very hard. Issues like menstruation, pregnancy and urinating are taboo subjects in most cultures so also all pertinent rules, written or unwritten, will be hard to change.

To understand why this is so, we need to include gender ideology in the analysis of our work.

“It is the women of Baldia who are the main agents of change and the focal point of all the community-based development activities. Initially, the girls were not allowed to come out of their homes but once the community understood the programme and outcome, and trusted the intention of the project, all the traditional barriers were lifted to the women’s participation in community development. It is essential to have women at all levels of the development projects to break the barriers of tradition.

Had the community organiser been a man instead of a woman in the Baldia Soakpit Project, the integration of women in the community development process would not have happened, because of the traditions and outlook of society. Traditions have strengths and weaknesses – it depends how sensitive one is while making interventions. Sensitivity is needed towards traditions and cultures when making project interventions, but culture is a dynamic phenomenon and can develop.”

From: A strategy for the integrated development of squatter settlements: a Karachi case study. By Q.A. Bakhtaari

In: GWA 2002: Lessons Learned Around the Globe

As mentioned before, gender is not synonymous with women.

In this context it is important to look back for a moment at the different approaches that have been developed and adapted in the process of focusing on women and development, recognising women’s

multiple tasks and their importance in production and development. These approaches should not be confused.

The first, to promote women, became known as ‘WID: women in development’. It was replaced in the late 1980s by a gender-based approach, ‘GAD, gender and development’. The example below illustrates the difference between the two approaches in policy development.

Although WID is an old approach many state interventions are still based on it. It aims at integrating women into existing development processes through specific interventions for them. It emphasises improving the efficiency of women as producers and increasing their income. In this approach women are passive recipients.

The GAD approach aims at finding ways to enable deprived groups to enhance their position in society and set their own agenda for development. This approach requires an understanding of gender relations and how inequalities are reproduced in different societies and contexts. Much work in the water sector is currently based on it. Since it contains many different perspectives it does not single out one particular recipe for promoting equality in the management of water resources.

Public policies directed at women predominantly (WID)	Public policies with a gender perspective (GAD)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide forms of state intervention based on involvement • Not necessarily take account of discrimination and can act as reinforcement of traditional tasks and stereotypes • Hide inequality behind measures supposedly aimed at improving the status of women (and other vulnerable groups) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide forms of intervention that promote decision-making and active citizenship of women • Contribute to changing tasks and traditional gender stereotypes • Make visible the issue of discrimination of women (and other vulnerable groups) and aim at redressing it

Source: A. C. Vaughan. Presentation ‘Gender mainstreaming and development, water and climate change’. Presented during the event “Primeras Jornadas Patagónicas de estudios de las mujeres y género”², April 2008, Argentina.

Gender equity versus gender equality

Gender equality is based on recognition that men and women often have different needs, are confronted with different constraints, have their own aspirations and contribute to sustainable uses in a differentiated way. It should not be regarded an ‘issue of women’ but involves men as well. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. It implies equal access to and control of resources by women and men. It promotes the elimination of economic and political barriers and the removal of limits to education and access to basic services so that women and men may have the same opportunities and benefits.

Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities. It implies participation by all people in processes of development and the application of a gender perspective in all our activities. This approach necessitates an analysis and understanding of the differences between women and men in

² “First Patagonian Works of Women and Gender Studies”.

terms of needs and visions, tasks and responsibilities, and levels of participation in decision-making. (UNESCO, 2000; Aguilar, 2006).

In the end, gender is a political issue. It is about the balance of power between women and men. By having a clear understanding of women's different tasks and needs and their relative disadvantage compared to men in relation to access to and control of resources, institutions and policy-making bodies can develop gender sensitive objectives for more equality resulting in empowerment of women.

Empowerment

Empowerment is a process of change enabling people to make choices and transform these into desired actions and results. In the bargain, people, not just women, are taking control of their own lives, improving their own position, setting their own agenda, gaining skills, developing confidence in themselves, solving problems and developing self-sufficiency.

Nobody can empower another person. One can only empower oneself to make decisions or express views. But people can be helped by convincing them and giving them tools for change. This may be done among others through advocacy and capacity building such as education and training which increases their opportunities. Better laws and regulations also support this process.

Empowerment leads to genuine participation of all actors. This in turn leads to more equal practices in which tasks, benefits and responsibilities are shared between women and men. Empowerment ultimately means to be proud of one's own identity.

Challenging the balance of power will have to come from the people themselves. A good example here is the experience from the Licto project in Ecuador, where indigenous women irrigators after having gone through a process of consciousness raising initiated and facilitated by an NGO asked for a change in the ways in which water titles were allocated to allow for titles in the names of both wives and husbands, and in this way becoming formally involved in the water users' organization.

A very important reason for this was the fact that in the absence of their husbands, formal membership would give them the power to deal and negotiate not only with other irrigators within the irrigators' association, but also with state agencies and other 'external' agents (Arroyo and Boelens, 1997 and 1998)

From: Wedlock or deadlock?

By: M.Z. Zwarteveen

Empowerment of poor people, women and other vulnerable groups, is an objective of the GAD approach but also an analytical concept. It has four interacting aspects - social, economic, political and physical. They should not be seen separately although they do not operate equally strong in all cases.

1. *Socio-cultural Empowerment* addresses the self-image of people as also how they are seen by their family members, the community, and the society at large. It leads to the right to one's own independent identity and a sense of self-respect. Changing the fact that society no longer sees women as second-class citizens is an example of social empowerment.

In water supply and sanitation, usually people at lower levels of hierarchy – the poor, women – are responsible for work most looked down on. This may include among others cleaning of toilets, waste removal and caring for the sick. If such activities were to be considered most important for family and community health instead of just dirty work their position and social status would rise. If this work were done at all levels instead of only the lowest categories it would also have a great empowering effect.

2. *Economic Empowerment* deals with work and income and the decisions related to work. Can one decide oneself what kind of work to do and how to spend the income and other benefits? Economic empowerment leads to equal access to and control of means of production and, ultimately, to economic independence.

Work in agriculture is usually unpaid if women work on family land. When people earn income in cash their situation can change. If they are enabled to decide about its spending one may call this empowerment.

3. *Political Empowerment* relates to the right to organise oneself, to participate in democratic processes, and to influence wider development efforts as also to represent at decision-making bodies like a village sanitation and water committee. It leads to a political say and the creation of a power base in a self-determined direction.

In general it can be said the more hierarchical a society the lower the position of women. The political aspects of empowerment are important for women because it means they will have a say in decision making and do not just take part in heavy and often dirty work. If they are enabled to influence development efforts they will feel empowered.

4. *Physical Aspects of Empowerment* refer to the right to decide about one's own body, sexuality, the number of children and the spacing between births. They also refer to the right to proper health care and clean water. They deal with the ability to resist violence and with physical dignity related to sanitation facilities specifically available to women. This includes the right to safety and security - for example not to be harassed or, worse, raped during nightly sanitary visits or when walking far to collect water.

It is important to realise that these four sides of empowerment should not be seen as empowering in isolation.

For example, what good does an income do to a woman if she cannot decide what to spend it on because she has to hand it over to her husband or mother-in-law? If she would not give it, she may be beaten. Her husband may decide to buy alcohol with that money and more violence results. So, economic empowerment is not enough if in isolation. Only if a woman's self-confidence is positive and she can avoid violence, if she can influence development efforts or can take part in decision-making she may feel empowered.

Likewise, what does a high status mean for a woman if there is no way to influence development efforts, if there is no dignity because she has to wait for darkness to relieve herself, or if there are beautiful toilet blocks the costs of which she cannot afford?

These are but a few examples of how the four aspects interact. (Muylwijk, 2006)

Gender issues and implications in the different water sectors

Gender is a key variable in all water sectors. Practical experience and research studies have demonstrated that *effective, efficient and equitable* management of water resources is only achieved when women and men are equally involved in consultation, management and implementation of water-related services. A gender balance ensures that the creativity, energy and knowledge of both

sexes contribute to making water schemes and eco-systems more sustainable. Also, the benefits and costs of water use then accrue equitably to all groups.

For poor women and men, IWRM is a daily reality. Available water is scarce and decisions about its use have to be rational. Drinking water comes first, then water for bathing and cattle and finally water for crops. Water for environment preservation is not an immediate concern but, obviously, it is to be conserved and protected as much as possible for its own sake as for the future of society.

Water for People

This sub-sector of 'domestic' water use deals with drinking water and water for sanitation and hygiene.

Women are the main beneficiaries of better water and sanitation as many are living in under-serviced urban slums or un-serviced rural areas in difficult circumstances. They often have to go far and wait for the dark to relieve themselves. They fear harassment and sexual assault while doing so. Culturally appropriate latrines that are easy to clean improve both personal and domestic activities.

Women are also responsible for water collection. They have to carry heavy loads and walk long distances for drinking water. The time they would gain by having a source of drinking water close-by could be used for education or generating an income.

As women are responsible for the health and hygiene of their families they benefit more from clean drinking water as it reduces illness in the family.

Thus, convenient access to water and sanitation would improve women's health and would enable women and girls to take advantage of educational and training opportunities that can help them combat poverty.

Multi-sectoral water use gives benefits to households, communities and national economies in three different ways. Firstly, it leads to better family hygiene and health and in this way reduces private and public health costs. Secondly, it makes it possible for women to produce food for home consumption with beneficial effects for nutrition, family health and child development. And lastly, productive uses of water by women, and to some degree by men, save domestic spending (e.g. for housing) and create new, additional income (GWA, 2003).

Water for Food production

A large part of the world's food production comes from the hands of women, yet they are generally not recognised as farmers. Because of increasing migration of men to urban areas and industrialised countries women are more and more involved in agriculture, both rain-fed and irrigated. This 'feminisation of agriculture' is not accompanied by a much needed handing over of land and water rights.

Although being the back-bone of the agricultural labour force women still have unequal access to production resources like water, bank loans, fertiliser, improved seeds and information. Women and men also have different tasks, needs and demands in agriculture, livestock production, and fisheries but those of women farmers and fisher women are hardly recognised and acknowledged. Extension programmes are mainly carried out by male extension agents and usually directed at men farmers leaving women farmers behind.

Water rights in Latin America, as in many other areas of the world, are mostly tied to land ownership or legally recognised community ownership.

Deere and Leon did a study of the impacts on gender of land and water rights in the context of land reform processes in the 1960s and 1970s to 1990s. They discovered it was required that beneficiaries had to be heads of households and permanent agricultural workers. This excluded most women from land ownership. Women in this way lost any legal claim to water and their voices in its management. In another study, they discovered that male migration has made women throughout Latin America primary farmers in small-scale agriculture.

Property rights in their names would ensure farm productivity, improve their access to credits and services, and in addition increase women's bargaining position within the household and the community.

In many cultures, women cannot own land or the land is in the name of their husbands and brothers. Thus, with a reallocation of land in irrigation schemes, women and particularly female headed households loose out. Without having official titles to land, they are excluded from land and water resulting in reduction of health, nourishment and self-reliance. (GWA, 2003: Zwartveen, 2006).

Water and the Environment

The way women and men use and manage water resources is closely linked to good environmental conditions and subsequent changes. The way women and men affect the environment through their economic and domestic activities correlates with the impact of environmental changes on their well-being.

Understanding these gender differences is essential for the development of policies aimed at improved environmental conditions as well as for improving health and well-being.

Poor people draw most heavily on common property resources such as forests, range lands, water bodies and inshore fishing grounds. They suffer extra when common resources are degraded.

On the one hand, there is a clear recognition of the need to allocate water separately for agriculture, industry, and household use. Institutions dealing with these sectors get priority in the development and management of water resources. On the other, water for nature preservation is often deemed a residual category. The need of water for maintaining environmental quality and sustaining ecosystems often goes unrecognised.

Water pollution affects poor people and particularly women seriously as they are usually the ones responsible for providing food and water for the household. The impacts of environmental degradation are not equal for men and women. On account of environmental degradation daily activities of women such as collecting water and fuel require more time, leaving them less time for productive activities.

A gender analysis of Bangladesh's Flood Plain Action Plan highlighted that women bore the greatest burdens from floods and that involving more women in decisions on mitigation methods would lead to different and more equitable solutions. The point has been noted by government and donors, and some corrective measures have been taken.

From: The Gender and Water Development Report 2003: Gender Perspectives on Policies in the Water Sector, GWA

Women play a critical role in the field of environment, particularly in the management of plants and animals, in forests, arid zones and wetlands. Their knowledge in this field is crucial to a sound and sustainable environment. Their experience with plants and animals gives them values and skills for environment preservation; their skills in managing natural resources help achieve ecologically sustainable production.

Shiva writes "...due to their 'caring tasks', especially those of fetching water, fodder and wood, women have been identified as inherently respectful of nature and understanding of their environment. The environmental degradation brought about by the exploitation of natural resources for economic growth systematically depleted women's relationship with nature and therefore the resources for 'staying alive'."

There is evidence, and general acknowledgement, that women have a special relation to nature. But it should be emphasised that not only women but all people depend on the environment and, therefore,

everyone has a shared responsibility with respect to the sustainable use of water and other natural resources. (GWA, 2003; Coles and Wallace, 2005).

The importance of gender mainstreaming and empowerment for access to water

Gender mainstreaming involves the integration of gender issues in all planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal areas at all levels so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.

This strategy requires the recognition of the different types of water actors/stakeholders who are, in an ideal world, dynamically and creatively engaged with one another. By involving men and women in influential roles at all levels, sustainability in the management of scarce water resources will improve.

As mentioned already, gender relations vary between cultures and context. They illustrate the specificity of how gender beliefs, traditions and attitudes affect water ownership, control of water, water use and the value put on water. Ideologies and images regarding water have their origins in religion and culture. Social constructs of water are strongly gendered. Addressing gender and equality issues involves targeting unequal social relations and the beliefs and cultures that structure and justify them. Yet all too often a gender perspective is misunderstood and applied simply as 'women's increased participation' in water programmes. The most vulnerable in communities are left behind. Therefore, water providers need to find ways to address complex gender issues, deeply culturally embedded, in the planning, design and implementation of water projects if they hope to achieve the goal of universal access.

There is no longer any doubt that water rights, rights to irrigated lands, and rights to water infrastructure and technology are predominantly vested in men. Nor is there any doubt that water decision making, at all levels, is dominated by men. Although in many areas and countries, women provide a large amount of water labour this is generally unpaid or under-remunerated. Besides, water and agriculture education continues to attract more men than women. Water-related professions continue to be one dominated by men although this is changing in some countries.

In addition, most water programmes and projects that address gender concerns focus on women's domestic roles and related concerns for drinking water and sanitation. Their concerns and priorities for food security and environmental sustainability receive less attention. Most organisations even focus either on only domestic or only productive roles.

Not realising how women's concerns in the different sectors influence each other undermines the programme's effectiveness (GWA, 2003; WEDO, 2003; Lahiri-Dutt, 2007).

An interesting fact to take into account is how the extent of gender ignorance varies with the level at which professionals are working. Those working closest with water users in rural areas generally have practical and hands-on gender awareness. They often meet and talk to women and know from daily experience that water is very much a woman's business. (Many of them deal rather ironically with gender questions in their everyday work, though.)

On the other hand, water professionals working farther from real-life situations, such as staff in government bureaucracies, generally find it much more difficult to recognise and address the importance of women and to understand the linkages between gender and water.

Access to and control of water

Much has been mentioned already about access to water and the crucial role of women in water management.

If at all women are involved in project implementation, most of the time they lack access to decision-making in the planning, designing and management phases. More so, inadequate involvement of both

women and men has hampered programmes and projects aimed at addressing sustainability in water resource management.

On the other hand, community participation and management approaches have failed to address these issues, largely because communities are often seen as a collection of people with a common purpose. Community management has been identified as a mechanism for ensuring effective water governance at the local level, especially for common property resources. It is often assumed that the local institutions are inclusive and take care of equal distribution of resources. In reality, a community is not a collection of equal people living in a particular geographic region. It is usually made up of individuals, women and men, and groups who command different levels of power, wealth, influence and an ability to express their needs, concerns and rights.

A focus on involving women at community level thus hides the power differentials and political interests within water institutions which shape water management and use. Information is needed on how water organisations operate or how they organise women's involvement within them.

Participation in decision-making is a very crucial issue in the control of resources. Capacity building is a very important tool for empowering people. It may lead to full participation by all stakeholders, women and men, and will result in greater equality in sharing of burdens, benefits and responsibilities between women and men. As long as poor people cannot participate fully and actively in decision-making they are not empowered. Without empowerment they won't have control over facilities and services for they are not able to make their own choices.

Women's participation and empowerment is essentially a political question, linked to changes in power relations. Involving a large number of poor women and men in decision-making processes can radically change the existing situation. It assures that the unique needs, priorities, and knowledge of different categories of women and men are included in management plans and policies. This means that water-related development initiatives will be more effective because the real users are addressed.

Many case studies claiming that programmes have strengthened women's empowerment actually refer to economic empowerment only. Fewer are best-practice case studies providing examples of change in household decision-making as a result of water programmes. Reviewing different best-practice examples, it becomes clear that an empowering participatory approach shows the best results. Evidence has shown that when only a gender perspective is applied women and girls are likely to benefit from increased water access. It does not necessarily advance gender equality, though. As a result, the full potential of women and girls is not used and programme sustainability is at risk.

The following example of real participation of women in planning, decision-making and management of water resources is also a clear case of strengthening women's empowerment, more encompassing than just economic empowerment

It is the experience of the Bi-national Women's Platform of the 'Bi-national Project Catamayo-Chira. Women, living in the watershed area, from the beginning of the project on had been left out of the planning and decision-making process of the project. But through training and capacity building these women empowered themselves. They decided to set-up the platform in order to have more legitimate right, and in this way they started to claim for active involvement in the planning and decision-making process as also the management of water resources of the watershed area. They have experienced through this process that they changed their position in society, that their opinions, concerns, priorities and needs are being taken into account and they feel that they can set their own agenda for development.

Source: Carolina Vergara, Gender Responsible of the bi-national project, as also personal contributions of women of the Women's Platform (Personal communications)

A deliberate strategy of gender mainstreaming can be useful to ensure that the issues affecting women and men are part of the analysis, planning, implementation, and evaluation of programmes and projects. More importantly, gender mainstreaming can assist in bringing about institutional and organisational change necessary to ensure gender equality as an on-going commitment. Disadvantaged people must be enabled to influence really the planning, design and management of water-related initiatives in ways that are appropriate, adequate and reliable for them. This requires a good analysis of these issues by the project management or implementing agency and proper allocation of resources to achieve these goals.

Lessons learned and good practices

Finding solutions for improved water supply, hygiene and sanitation needs to take gender ideology into account: for instance, women feel more responsible than men for maintaining taps or cleaning sanitary facilities.

Women and men ought to be invited to tell their opinions and ideas about who is responsible for what, and to give their suggestions for facilities in terms of location, style, maintenance, cleaning, payments, and so on.

At the same time, it must not be assumed that the outcomes of such participation are the same everywhere. For example, all situations in which taps or toilets had been constructed but are not used or misused should be avoided. The causes have to be found out beforehand so that changes can be planned properly right from the start.

By now it should be clear that women, although the worst victims of poor sanitary and water situations, are the most important actors in this field. They have the responsibility, the understanding and knowledge, and the greatest interest in clean services and the health of their families. They need to be involved as main actors. Men need to be involved too because all should be responsible, not just women.

Genuine participation of women in decision-making and management of water resources at local and national levels is required as much as a gender analysis of the tasks and responsibilities of women in water management at both levels. Only by having a sound knowledge of the specific circumstances of countries and regions it will be possible to design decision-making and management processes that really involve women.

Gender-sensitive indicators can function in (potential) impact assessments as well as decision-making related to existing and new projects. They have a special usefulness by their ability to point out changes in the status and roles of women and men over time and, therefore, to measure whether gender equality is being achieved.

Consequently, using such indicators and other relevant evaluation techniques will lead to a better understanding of how results can be achieved. That is why they will also feed into more effective future planning and programme delivery.

The basic strategy for gender-sensitive indicators is to use quantitative and qualitative *methods* in combination to measure gender-related changes in society overtime.

A gender approach in public decision-making and local community structures has many benefits. It strengthens the performance of projects and programmes. These, in turn, will be more effective because the real users are addressed. Further it increases the possibilities of sustainability. Certainly no less important: self-esteem, self-confidence, empowerment and gender equality are other explicit benefits of this approach.

Gender ideology is not easy to change. Only if people are aware of it and really want to change it could a beginning be made towards more equal responsibility and efficient water resource management.

In practice it will not turn out to be difficult involving women as well as men in water management. It is a matter of doing so in fact, of inviting women to meetings, taking them seriously, and giving them a clear impression their contribution is appreciated. Meetings need to be held at places within easy reach of women and at timings convenient to them, facilitating their participation also by allowing them to bring their children.

In the end, it is a matter of enabling women to enable themselves to participate in the development process of their own communities.

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