



NEW

LAO PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
Peace, Independence, Democracy, Unity, Prosperity

National Centre for Environmental Health and Water Supply
Ministry of Health (NEW)

MOVING GENDER STRATEGY INTO PRACTICE

**STEPS TAKEN IN THE RURAL WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION
SECTOR IN LAO PDR**



**World Bank Water and
Sanitation Program –
East Asia and Pacific**



unicef

A SITUATION REPORT

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Preface

This Situation Report on Gender in Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector in Lao PDR is prepared by the National Centre for Environmental Health and Water Supply (NEW, commonly known as Nam Saat) as part of its activities to implement the Annual Workplan for the year 1999-2000. This report tries to summarize some key achievements and developments in Lao PDR to promote more gender balanced approaches in the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme.

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Introduction

During the 1990's the Lao People's Democratic Republic has made progress towards improving *gender equity*¹. Some of the key legal and practical steps that the Government has taken to provide a national framework for promotion of gender include:

- The new Lao Constitution from 1991 which guarantees equal rights for women and men.
- The Government's endorsement of "The Twelve Areas of Critical Concern" from the 1995 Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women of the International Conference on Women in Beijing². Some of the relevant areas of concerns are *Women and Health, Women in Power and Decision-Making, Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women, Women and the Environment*.
- Emphasis by the Government and external support agencies (ESAs) on women's participation in national and local development efforts.
- Gradually, the appointment of more women into leadership positions in the Government and the National Revolutionary Party.

In line with these national progressive actions and the international experience related to gender promotion in water supply and sanitation projects, in 1997 the National Center for Environmental Health and Water Supply (commonly known as Nam Saat) incorporated the principles of gender equity and empowerment into its National Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Sector Strategy and Guideline National Framework (hereafter called the RWSS Strategy).

Nam Saat is the national government agency in the Ministry of Public Health responsible for rural hygiene promotion, water supply and sanitation in Lao PDR. Its primary local partners are the Ministry of Education, the Lao Women's Union (LWU), the Lao Youth Union (LYU), and the Lao National Front for Reconstruction (NLSS), the Department of Rural Development (DRD) and other local partners.

This Gender Situation Report assesses Nam Saat's step-by-step actions to move gender equity from a strategic principle into practice. Sections include brief overviews of gender development efforts globally, in Lao PDR and within the Nam Saat programme. It then highlights Nam Saat's step-by-step gender improvements in community level activities and notes the ongoing challenges of changing daily personnel attitudes and actions within Nam Saat and its partner agencies. This report also tries to identify some of the lingering gaps in *gender balance* and *gender sensitivity*. Finally, this report shows how Nam Saat can incorporate gender-sensitive actions into its main activities, with minimal staff time and effort.

¹ Gender Equity = giving equal opportunity to women and men in education, work and social enhancement.

² For more information, reference is made to "The 12 Areas of Critical Concern –The Beijing Platform for Action for the Advancement of Women", GRID Centre, Lao Women's Union.

Global Recognition of Gender in Development

Worldwide research shows that a country's economic development and well-being improves as gender equity rises. In other words, when women and men share equally the benefits and responsibilities as well as burdens of family life, development has a greater chance of being efficient, effective, sustainable and just.

In the past decades, research has shown that gender issues need to be addressed as they influence sustainability and effective use of water supply and sanitation services. These findings have gained global acceptance during international meetings, such as the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (1981-1990) and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in September 1995. Now that the critical, important and central role of women in the water supply and sanitation sector is widely recognized, these research findings have to be implemented in the field. About the same time, international consensus began to emerge that strategies for designing and implementing policies, programs and projects in water and sanitation were more successful when they used demand-driven, participatory approaches rather than traditional supply driven approaches. Some lessons from the experience gained over the last decade in terms of gender, water and sanitation are summarized in **Box 1**³. A global study⁴ on water and sanitation in 2000 produced empirical evidence about community services using approaches that are demand-responsive, gender-sensitive and poverty-targeted. Significantly, the study showed that such services increase chances of sustainability and effective use within communities.

BOX 1: LESSONS FROM PROJECT EXPERIENCE ON GENDER, WATER AND SANITATION:

1. Gender and the role of women is a central concern in water and sanitation
2. Specific, simple mechanisms must be created to ensure women's involvement
3. Gender analysis is integral to project identification and data collection
4. Attention to gender needs to start as early as possible
5. Ensuring both women's and men's participation improves project performance
6. A learning-by-doing approach is more gender-responsive than a blueprint approach which assumes that everything is known can be planned in advance
7. Projects are more effective when both women's and men's preferences about "hardware / choice of technology" are addressed
8. Women and men promote project goals through both their traditional and non-traditional roles
9. Non-governmental organizations and especially women's groups can facilitate a gender balanced approach
10. Gender-related indicators should be included when assessing project performance
11. Gender issues are important because they influence sustainability and effective use of facilities

Historic Perspective of Gender in Development in Lao PDR

In the mid-1990's, with persistent pressures from the National Revolutionary Party, the LWU and the Human Resource Development Committee and support from UNICEF, various ESAs and NGOs, public awareness and attitudes about *gender equity* in the Lao PDR began to change. As a result, many development programs are now actively striving for:

- **Gender awareness** to help people broaden their attitudes about what women and men are capable of learning and doing at work and at home.

³ "Toolkit on Gender in Water and Sanitation", Gender Toolkit Series No. 2, The World Bank, 1996.

⁴ "Linking Sustainability with Demand, Gender and Poverty: A study in community-managed water supply projects in 15 countries", by Bruce Gross, Christine van Wijk and Nilanjana Mukherjee, Water & Sanitation Program, World Bank, 2000.

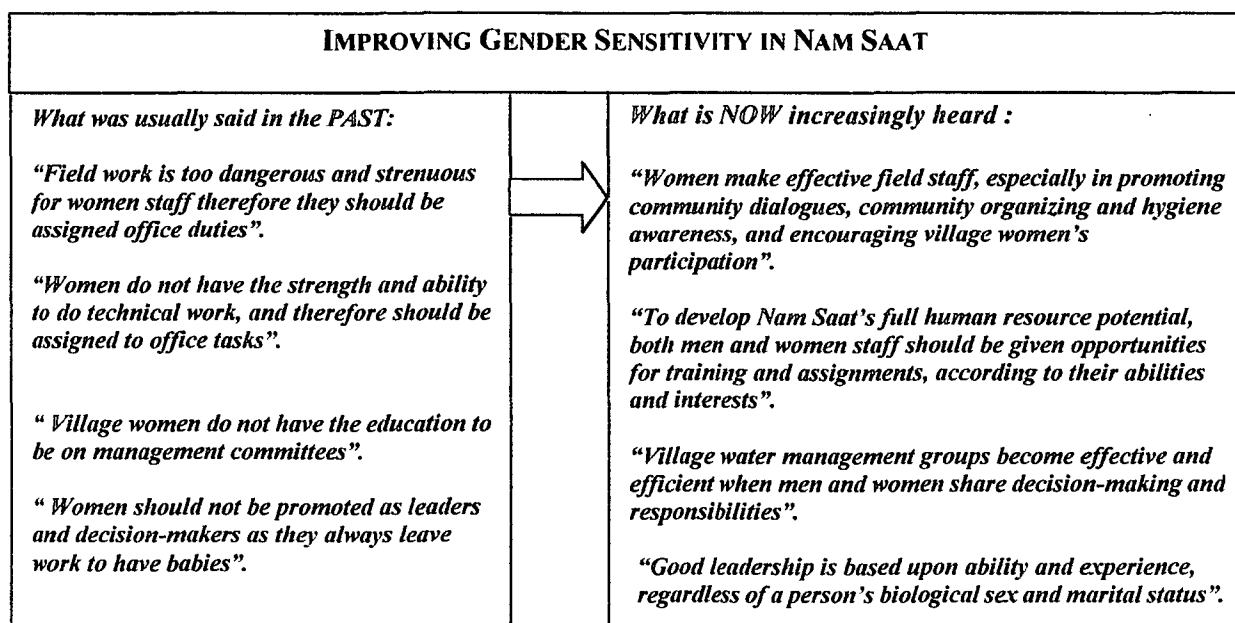
- **Gender sensitivity** to understand and take action on the barriers which limit the roles and duties of women and sometimes men;
- **Gender balance** to give equal opportunity to women and men in learning, decision-making, and demonstrating their work abilities;
- **Gender mainstreaming** to incorporate gender sensitive thinking and actions into the core of work and social setting without having to take special actions.

Gender and Water Supply & Sanitation in Lao PDR

In line with the Government's national progressive agenda, and the international experience with gender promotion in water supply and sanitation projects in various parts of the world, Nam Saat's National Strategy recognized the advantages of **gender equity** by specifying several gender strategies.

1. Encourage **women's involvement in community decision-making, implementation and management** of water supply, sanitation and hygiene activities.
2. Increase the number of Nam Saat women personnel at every level and in all major components, including the use of **Gender Balance Targets (GBT)**⁵.
3. Set up a **special training apprenticeship for Nam Saat's work** for rural and ethnic minority women who lack the education level for regular government service.
4. Conduct **gender awareness training** for all staff.
5. Ensure that **gender dis-aggregated data** is collected and analyzed.

Since the approval of the National RWSS Strategy in 1997, Nam Saat has made notable progress in its community level work as the analysis below shows. These statements show that incorporating gender balance and sensitivity into its institutional make-up remains a challenge for the future. However, herein lie some lessons from which Nam Saat is basing its future steps towards a more gender balanced approach and gender equity.



⁵ Gender Balance Targets = Percentages set for women and men's participation for each activity of the Plans of Actions. The targets are achievable and reasonable, and intended to progressively move towards a 50 : 50 ratio.

Participatory Approach in Communities Promotes Gender Equity

Nam Saat and its partners support the principle of empowering community women in all aspects of its work. In the past, community decisions were made by a small group of village leaders, which almost always consisted of only men except for the local LWU representative. Applying the Participatory Approach in a systematic manner opens opportunities for both women and men to be involved together in every aspect of the project. For many women, especially those from ethnic minority groups, Nam Saat's new Participatory Approach offers women their first occasion to discuss, plan, decide, implement and manage village action equally with men. Through this approach, Nam Saat has put gender equity into the core of its community work. Some elements of such a systematic Participatory Approach in the provision of water supply and sanitation services currently applied or planned for application are:

By its nature, the Participatory Approach promotes gender equity into the mainstream of the Nam Saat's work and improves women's opportunities to participate.

- * *The Community Dialogue Process*⁶ encourages women and men to voice their opinions separately and then come to a consensus.
- * *Informed Choice*: Women and men choose the most cost-effective, appropriate technology for the village (Informed Choice).
- * *Community User Groups*: User Groups are gender balanced in both duties and numbers.
- * *Consensus on Village Agreements*: Village Agreements are discussed in the village in order to build ownership before signing.
- * *Contribution during Construction*: Women and men participate with skilled and unskilled labor during the construction.
- * *Hygiene Promotion*: Women and men learn and practice improved hygiene to improve health and well being.
- * *Hygiene Promotion in Schools*: Girls and boys in school are taught good hygiene practices.

To ensure that women are not disenfranchised once Nam Saat's project work is completed, it is essential that:

- Nam Saat continues to adhere to the key principles of the participatory approach which is now being implemented by Nam Saat in the provinces, districts and villages .
- Nam Saat monitors the effects of this participatory approach and its effect on gender equity over the long-term.



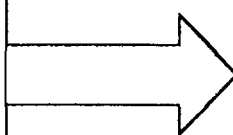
Community Dialogue in Ban Vang Va Village, Oudomxay Province

⁶ For further information, see "Manual on the 12 Steps Approach in Participatory Planning & Implementation, Part A", Nam Saat/WSP-EAP/UNICEF, June 2000 and "Manual on Community Dialogue", Nam Saat/WSP-EAP/UNICEF, July 2000.

GENDER DEVELOPMENT IN LAO PDR AT A GLANCE

1985: Gender Concerns Invisible

- Nam Saat consults and trains mainly men community leaders on water supply and management issues.
- LWU trains mainly women on hygiene.
- Nam Saat field staff are almost all men.
- Nam Saat leadership at all levels is mostly men.

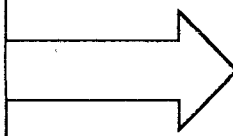


1997: Gender Concerns Raised in National Strategy on Rural Water Supply and Environmental Health which includes:

- A new effort to **increase the women staff within Nam Saat** at every level and in all major components, including the use of *Gender Balance Targets*.
- A **special training internship mechanism** for the recruitment of rural women and ethnic minority volunteers who do not have the education levels for regular government service.
- **Regular staff training in gender awareness and sensitivity.**
- **Gender dis-aggregated data in surveys and analysis** for improving annual plans of actions.
- Encouragement of **women's involvement in community decision-making, implementation and management** of water supply, sanitation and hygiene activities.

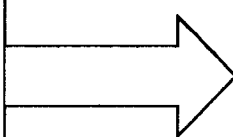
1986-90: LWU Begins WID Efforts

- LWU begins to pilot Women in Development (WID) projects which focus on water supply and sanitation.
- Lao Women's Congress of 1989 endorses women's participation in community development, noting LWU's effective results in water supply, hygiene and sanitation with Nam Saat.



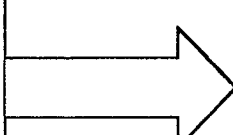
1991: Constitution Calls for Equality

Lao Constitution declares equality of women and men. UNICEF, ESA's and many NGOs call for increased women's participation in Nam Saat work.



1995: International Gender Platforms

Following active participation, Lao Government endorses twelve Gender Platforms adopted in the International Conference on Women in Beijing.



GENDER DEVELOPMENT IN LAO PDR AT A GLANCE

1998 – 2000 : Gender Learning Begins

At Central Nam Saat Level

- Annual Workplan for 1999 -2000 sets *Gender Balance Targets* for each proposed training activity (except TOT on Management).
- Two women hygienists that left the unit in 1997 were replaced by two women.
- Gender Awareness Workshop for central leaderships takes place.
- Two planning staff and adviser attend two week gender and water supply training in the Netherlands.
- Dis-aggregated data collected on staffing in JICA funded projects in Bokeo and Luang Namtha provinces .
- No Gender Balance Targets set for other activities (e.g. recruitment of staff, participants in planning and review meetings).
- Women have not yet been appointed in senior decision making positions.
- Draft Gender Plan of Action for 1999-2000 is only partially implemented.
- Recruitment of regional /national advisers strives for gender balance. Staffing remains largely male, providing few women role models.
- Members of the Gender Working Group find meeting together difficult due to workloads and conflicting schedules.

At Provincial and District Nam Saat Level

- Nam Saat field offices add a few women, but staffing largely remains gender imbalanced.
- Two Sekong women trained as drillers and one Bolikhamxai woman trained as store manager, presenting possible role models for the future.
- Spearhead provinces improve gender balance in teamwork in communities with partners.
- Gender Development Plan prepared by Oudomxay Province

At the Community Level

- Community Dialogue Promotes opportunities for both men and women to express their viewpoints and make decisions together.
- Within certain ethnic groups, women's participation remains weak, perhaps because of poor cultural sensitivity.
- Users groups need to be gender balanced.
- Men and women participate in unskilled labor tasks, but not in skilled labor tasks.
- Boys and girls learn about hygiene in schools.

2001 and onwards: Future Targets for Gender Equity, constituting move from Women in Development to Gender and Development approach

At Central Nam Saat Level

- Set Nam Saat Policy on *Gender Equity* and incorporate into annual personnel recruitment and training plans.
- Insert a minimum of three gender strengthening actions into each annual Plan of Action.
- Set and monitor annually *Gender Balance Targets* for personnel recruitment, technical and non-technical job positions, and training activities.
- Train Nam Saat planning staff on analysis of dis-aggregated gender data.
- Provide Nam Saat senior leadership with advanced personnel management course with strong emphasis on gender sensitivity.
- Recruitment for further advisory support will aim for gender balance.
- Set the framework for a pilot project for Nam Saat Apprenticeships for Women and Minorities in districts and provinces.

At Provincial and District Nam Saat Level

- Incorporate gender awareness training into all workshops and meetings. Include discussions about differences on gender roles and customs observed among various ethnic groups.
- Set up pilot project on Nam Saat Apprenticeships for Women and Minorities.
- Examine personnel needs and gender balances annually and set Gender Balance Targets.
- Implementation of Gender Development Plan in Oudomxay Province

At the Community Level

- Begin gender sensitive monitoring, noting impact on quality of work and effectiveness of members of User Group Committees on sustained operations and maintenance.
- Include women in skilled labor training and in technical decisions.
- Intensify hygiene promotion among both men and women.

Gender-Sensitive Participation in Ethnic Minority Villages

In early 2000, a JICA-funded assessment of community participation provided useful gender dis-aggregated observations about community participation in decision-making and physical labor in 34 ethnic minority villages in Bokeo and Luang Nam Tha. The sample showed a range of ethnicity (Leu, Doi, Lamae, Yuan, Thai Dam, Khmu, Akha and Hmong), economic well-being (ownership of lowland, upland and mixed fields) and locations (close to district towns to remote).

Women and men's participation in decision-making was rated high in 28 out of 34 villages (82%). People's participation in physical construction was similar, with higher women's participation than men's, except in those villages close to the district center. In only one village a poor gender scenario was seen: women's participation in decision-making was negligible, but they did almost all the physical construction. Survey data also showed differences in participation among the ethnic groups. Most of the Leu and Yuan villages had a high or very high level of women's participation in village decision-making and in construction activities, regardless of the gender factor. Hmong, Khmu, Lamae, Doi villages did not show the same level of women's participation in similar activities as the Leu and Yuan villages.

This gender-sensitive assessment technique which mainly uses observations and key informant discussions is relatively easy to implement and can produce a tracking of gender participation in decision-making, construction and operations and maintenance. After defining the steps and criteria for the observations, provincial-monitoring staff could be trained to perform these assessments regularly. With such data, Nam Saat Central could be trained to make analytical gender assessments.

Positive Gender Steps at the Central Nam Saat

Since 1997, Nam Saat Central has undertaken several small noteworthy steps towards gender development in rural water supply and sanitation in Lao PDR. Central leadership, advisors and supporting agencies attended a one-day Gender Awareness Workshop in early 2000. This will need to be repeated at least annually to refresh the learning and assess the gender progress. Similar training also need to be encouraged at the provincial and district levels.

Also, a system for collecting gender dis-aggregated data on personnel records has been introduced, making future gender analysis possible on Nam Saat's staffing patterns. However, besides staffing pattern, other ways of becoming more gender-sensitive also needs to be built into the project performance monitoring systems which is essential for monitoring the progress toward gender balance in terms of numbers, positions and types of responsibilities. This initiatives are in line with the Prime Minister **Decree on Gender Statistics**⁷.

Nam Saat Central is witnessing a severe work overload as a result of increasing program activities, while staff numbers do not increase simultaneously. The work overload hindered the full implementation of the forward-looking Gender Plan of Action for 1999-2000 for Water Supply and Sanitation. This plan called for 1) conducting a baseline gender survey, 2) setting a national gender policy for Nam Saat and 3) developing detailed staff gender training courses and programmes.

Nam Saat recognizes that it is best to plan achievable gender steps which do not consume much staff time or energy for only gender activities and which fit into ongoing main activities.

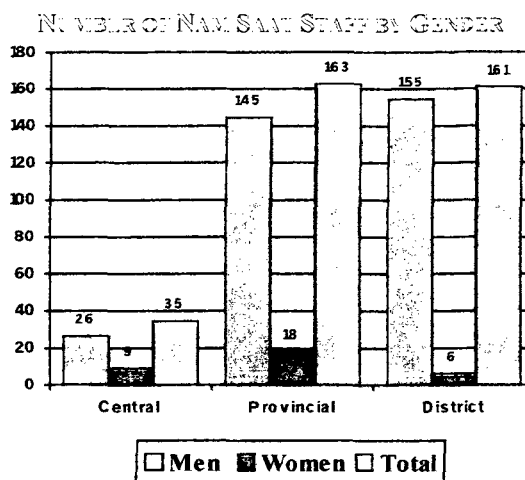
This Plan, developed by two Nam Saat planning staff and an advisor during a two-week specialized gender and water supply training course in the Netherlands, proved too ambitious given the severe staff and time constraints faced by Nam Saat. Even the designated staff of the Gender Working Group rarely found time to meet. This calls for a strategic plan to mainstream gender through existing activities and not through special additional activities. Otherwise, it tends to become an additional burden for a small group of people on top of their other work and hence not so effective.

⁷ Decree No. 0009, May 2000: All official data collection processes should integrate gender statistics and promote dis-aggregated data collection

Achieving Gender Balance in Staffing is Challenging

One persisting gender weakness lies in personnel recruitment and position assignments at all levels. To achieve a gender balance within Nam Saat, women and men should be given the chance to be leaders, managers, social motivators, and technicians based upon their abilities and interests.

Generally, women are under-represented in the overall Nam Saat organization. Only 33 staff, equal to roughly 8 percent of the total staff, are women. Overall, at the central level, women make up 26%, compared to 11 % in the provinces and only 4 percent in the districts. This contrasts strongly with other departments in the Ministry of Public Health, where women make up 55 percent of the total overall staff and where the number of female professionals is exceptionally high.



At all Nam Saat levels, there are no senior women managers. This rate compares poorly to the national civil service average of 6 percent. Despite the significant number of qualified professional women in the Ministry of Public Health, until 2000 Nam Saat had no policy for giving professionally qualified women preference when filling vacant senior and mid-level management positions.

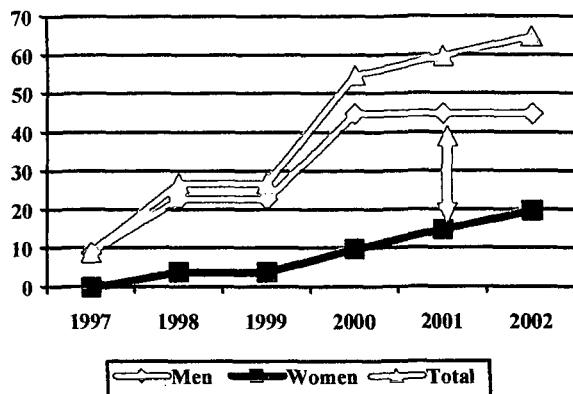
At the central office, strengthening of the hygiene promotion activities saw an increase in the percentage of women technical staff. Presently, at the provincial and district levels, women technicians comprise 7 percent of the total number of staff, indicating a slight growth compared to 1997 Nam Saat personnel data. In part, these rates mirror the 66% illiteracy rate among women in Lao PDR. They also reflect national gender biases in employment: women rarely are assigned to technical designing and surveying, and construction positions, and men are less likely to be given secretarial work.

Nam Saat is in the process to finalize its Human Resource Development Plan and to widely implement its Gender Policy, both of which will provide useful insights for further improving the gender balance. With the expected increase in the number of women staff, the number of women role models will rise. This will build confidence among Nam Saat staff and attract other women into Nam Saat's program.

It is noted in this regard, that the 1999-2000 Work Plan did set **Gender Balance Targets (GBTs)** for proposed training activities. An analysis on the outcome of reaching those targets will be most instructive for setting GBTs in other critical activities of the Nam Saat programme, such as staff recruitment, staff involvement in planning and review meetings. Similar target setting is considered very useful and needs to be continued.

Setting Gender Balance Targets – an example from Oudomxay It was agreed in the start-up workshop in February 2000 to increase the capacity of the provincial and district units such as the managing secretariat, the provincial/district coordination units, the hygiene promotion and technical teams by gradually recruiting more women than men. As is shown, from 2000 onwards, the number of men staff is planned to remain constant while the number of women staff will increase to 20 % or 31% by the year 2002.

Gender Situation and Development Plan, Oudomxay Province, Start-up Workshop, April 2000



In all Provincial Implementation Planning workshops, Nam Saat requested the provinces to have a gender balanced participation. Good intentions, however, do not always produce results. In the July 2000 Workshop for several southern provinces, for example, no provincial women attended, despite instructions from central Nam Saat and designated funds.

Such imbalanced gender participation indicates that leaders selecting participants in various activities are not yet recognizing the need for women's participation. As a result, they designate only heads of provincial departments, mostly men, and the LWU representatives, who are often busy and overburdened with "representing women."

Meanwhile, the potential of

plentiful professional women in the health and education sectors are not fully being recognized.

Although gender balance in staffing is important, other institutional factors need to be addressed through a clear strategy. Increased focus is required on a) making gender equity explicit in policies and project/program objectives, b) introducing gender-sensitive monitoring indicators on project and staff performance, c) using planning and monitoring methods which encourage women's participation, d) promoting gender-sensitive performance through training and incentives, and e) mixing women and men skills into all types of work, regardless of social stereotypes. All these factors need to be present in a strategy to make such a institutional strategy a powerful tool for change.

To attain gender balance in staffing requires gender-sensitive policies, strategies, and targeted planning & monitoring and committed leadership in Nam Saat.

District and Provincial Women Staff Essential for Local Effectiveness



Women's active participation in construction.

As suggested in the national Sector Strategy, Nam Saat has established valuable alliances with the LWU, LYU, Hygiene Units and Education Departments. Inter-sectoral teamwork is crucial for performing participatory planning, community dialogues and hygiene promotion activities at provincial and district levels. These partnerships actually help to boost the gender balance in field teams, as Nam Saat technicians are predominantly men.

However, there is a negative side to this. By relying heavily on partners for creating gender balance in staffing, Nam Saat's severe gender imbalance in the provinces and districts is masked and the pattern of staff selection and work assignments remains largely as in the past - men are assigned field work and management positions and women continue to be assigned basic office tasks⁸. Furthermore, the gender discrepancy hampers Nam Saat's overall effectiveness, especially in communicating with village women, the main collectors of water supply and promoters of hygiene change.

In remote under-served areas where few local women have attained minimal education for government service, Nam Saat recruitment will need innovative actions, such as developing an apprenticeship program for women.

One of the added barriers that Nam Saat faces, particularly in under-served districts, is that extremely few women, especially among the ethnic minorities, attain a high school diploma, a requirement for becoming a civil servant. In addition to this, national budget constraints restrict the hiring of additional personnel. Yet, it is believed that without women district staff, the persistent gender and linguistic barriers found in most ethnic minority settings will not be eased and as such hinder the provision of sustainable water supply and sanitation services. One innovative solution is to form a special work apprenticeship program to train and recruit women who have had little opportunity for education and work.

**Special Work Apprenticeship Program:
Filling the Gender Personnel Gaps in Poor Areas**

To service difficult-to-reach areas, where basic education and work opportunities are limited, an innovative apprenticeship program for women and ethnic minorities is emerging. One model set up by the Sekong Indigenous People's Development Programme (SIP-Dev) mentors ten district development trainees (5 women, 5 men, and all ethnic minorities). The target is to provide them with continuous on-the-job training in community development (8 months / year) and adult education classes (4 months / year) for up to 5 years. In return, SIP-Dev builds a critical core of women and ethnic minority developers without whom the institution's work could not be implemented over the long-term. The apprentices receive a modest trainee stipend (equivalent to a low level government salary). The annual cost for the training, and stipends of 10 apprenticeships is less than \$10,000. Funded through donor support, the apprentices are not government-salaried staff, but vocational trainees.

Personal Profile of Ms. Souvannali, only female technician with Nam Saat, Sanyabouly Province⁹

Ms. Souvannali (Nali) started working at the provincial Nam Saat office about three years ago after graduating in nursing with a focus on hygiene education. Her original job was accountant, but she also did secretarial work.

Her supervisor, Dr. Sythat, encouraged Nali to go with him and the all-male technical team when they went into villages because he believed that a woman would make village women feel more comfortable. He was right: many women were much more interested and willing to talk with Nali than they would have been with an all-male technical team. At first Dr. Sythat had to support Nali's work by helping her get familiarize with participatory extension methods but she learned quickly and assumed more responsibility with every visit.

Through the years, Nali's experience and knowledge continued to increase as she moved from needs assessment in villages to more technical work as well. Now Nali has finished studying *Auto-cad*, a computer design program used by water technicians for building Gravity-fed Water Systems. She has been on site for the construction of several such systems, and knows a lot about designing and building water and sanitation infrastructure. Her three years experience working with the Nam Saat team in Sayaboury has been a time of learning and exchanging. Having Nali on the technical team when going into villages sends a positive message to villagers regarding the role of women in clean water work - that water supply work is not just men's work. This contributes to the acceptance of women as full members of water user groups. Because Nali enjoys work with villagers, many people benefit from her knowledge and experience. She loves the challenges of her work.

"I have many years of experience... I can help with construction, I can do needs assessment with villagers and I know how to build latrines or Gravity-fed Water Systems in rural villages" - Souvannali, September 2000.

⁸ With a few exceptions : 2 drillers in Sekong province, 1 store manager in Houphan and 1 technician in Sayaboury.

⁹ Information Provided by Save the Children Australia, Lao PDR

Several Small Steps Make a Big One

Nam Saat has begun to recognize the practical advantages of promoting Gender Equity and empowering women. Furthermore, it is finding practical creative solutions to overcome its gender barriers, to improve gender balances, and to undertake gender sensitive action. From Nam Saat's gender-focused efforts in the late 1990's, three main lessons have emerged.

1. If implemented within an overall framework, consistently taking **small gender-sensitive steps** can lead to a big step forward on gender equity and the advancement of women.
2. Within ongoing main activities, there are **numerous opportunities to include gender-sensitive actions** with minimal staff time and inputs.
3. **Gender-sensitized leaders** with strong commitment for achieving gender equity are crucial for guiding gender policies and actions at all levels.

With these lessons in mind, in mid-2000 Nam Saat Central authorized work on three additional small gender steps which should take minimal amounts of time and staffing and which should spark broader gender actions.

- Approval of a short **Nam Saat Policy on the Promotion Gender Equity** for consideration in Nam Saat's Annual Review Meeting. (See next page.)
- Finalization of the **Human Resource Development Plan with its Annual Plan of Action**, ensuring that recommendations are gender-sensitive and that gender balanced approaches are applied in the human resource development of Nam Saat at all levels.
- A brief **Concept Paper for a Nam Saat Pilot Apprenticeship Programme** for recruiting women in under-served areas.

Furthermore, Nam Saat intends to propose a series of small gender-sensitive steps for consideration, review and reporting at each annual work plan such:

- Examine the progress towards gender equity at the Annual Review Meeting.
- Target at least three new achievable gender-sensitive actions for the year.
- Set Gender Balance Targets for all activities involving meetings, training, study tours, and recruitment, and assess the progress in the year.
- Require that all reporting contain gender dis-aggregated data and a section on the gender situation and problems encountered.
- Include in job descriptions the phrase "*women are urged to apply*" and "*qualifications being equal, women will be given preference*" as an initial step toward improving personnel recruitment and assignment at all levels.

Collectively, these progressive gender actions should not only improve Nam Saat's gender equity, but also provide useful lessons for other government departments in the Lao PDR and elsewhere.

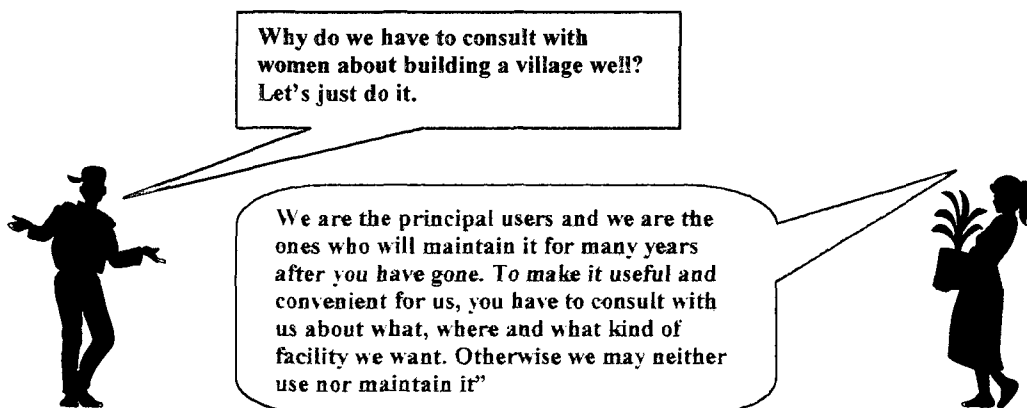
Nam Saat Policy on Promoting Gender

The National Center for Environmental Health and Water Supply (commonly known as Nam Saat) affirms the Constitutional right that all women and men have equal rights. As stated in its Rural Water Supply and Environmental Health Sector Strategy, Nam Saat endorses the policy of promoting equal gender rights and opportunities within all aspects of its program.

In accord with that policy, Nam Saat staff, partners agencies and external support agencies are strongly urged to:

1. Ensure equal opportunity for women staff of Nam Saat and its partner agencies to participate in and to lead activities in planning, implementation, evaluation and learning;
2. Foster a professional atmosphere of gender sensitivity and gender awareness;
3. Improve the gender balance in its overall personnel staffing, particularly position related to hygiene awareness, design and survey and senior management;
4. Enable women as well as men to voice their concerns and ideas, make decisions, and have access to the learning, power, and benefits.

Presented to all participants at the Annual Review and Planning Meeting,
7-11 August 2000, Thalut, Vientiane Province





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