

5.8 Women and the Water Utilization Project

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GH.UP 83

Our purpose in this section is to draw attention to a serious contradiction in the structure and management of WUP. Essentially, this contradiction is that the primary users of water in Upper Region are village women, yet women have not been accorded a priority role in the organizational structure or activities of WUP. In fact, their interest and role have been neglected, ignored or subordinated too often. In our view, this contradiction must be resolved in the next operational phase of WUP. What is at stake is not only social economic equality between genders, which has been affirmed by the United Nations as a basic human right in a declaration to which Canada is a signatory. Also at stake, however, is the practical "on-the-ground" success of WUP as a model for development assistance in rural water supply and utilization. Put more severely, without resolution of "the women's question", WUP is destined to fail to achieve its objectives, and consequently, its desired outputs. In terms of the need to safeguard their investment in WUP to date, neither CIDA nor GWSC, therefore, can afford to ignore this serious problem.

The basis of our concern arises out of our own field-work and project analysis conducted in late 1982. It is based as well on extensive research on the social and

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economic impact of the URWSP and WUP on village women in the Bolgatanga area carried out by Rose Mae Harkness of Carleton University in 1980 and 1981. Finally, our concern is also based on constructive critiques of past development projects from a women's perspective endorsed by a host of international development agencies, including USAID, The World Bank, OECD, and the ILO. In these critiques are also to be found concrete suggestions for ensuring the fullest participation of rural women in the development process in general and in rural water supply and utilization projects in particular. In the following subsections we will present recommendations designed to resolve the contradiction of the role of women in WUP, and to ensure the ultimate success as an innovative development assistance effort.

5.8.1 Maintenance

Typically, rural water supply projects in the Third World have ignored the possible employment of women as pump caretakers who carry out routine and minor handpump maintenance and liaise with government authorities regarding more serious maintenance problems. Development assistance agencies have adopted this position to their peril. The motivation and expertise of village women as the primary collectors and users of water has remained underutilized

and their human resources underdeveloped. Many rural water projects have failed because of lack of community interest, management and organization. As the members of the community with the greatest interest in the daily performance of the pump, women should play a vital part in maintenance activities. Mary Elmendorf and Richard Isley, of the Water and Sanitation Project of USAID, elaborate:

In this area, too, women can play a vital part. They can be trained in surveillance for leaks and other defects in the system, keeping stock of spare parts, overseeing a small budget, doing routine maintenance and minor repairs, maintaining liaison with local authorities and district and regional technical services, and training other community and household members in maintenance and repair techniques. In Angola, women have been recruited as water-source monitors, with the result that the breakdown rate has fallen considerably. In Bolivia, as an adjunct to an agricultural development project, bilingual indigenous women 17-25 years of age have been trained to give immunizations, provide information on child nutrition, and lecture on the proper maintenance of water and sanitation facilities. Some of these young women are now in complete charge of repair and maintenance of the facilities. The idea that technology is too complex for simple rural people in developing countries (especially for women) is a myth: broken and inoperative water supply systems and abandoned latrines have been observed in places where village skills extended to maintaining and repairing bicycles, transistor sets, irrigation pumps, ceiling fans, air conditioners, and a variety of small industrial machines and tools -- not to mention sewing machines, both pedal models and electronic ones, that were kept running by women. (Elmendorf and Isley, 1982:230)

In her review of the literature on this matter, Rose Mae Harkness (1982) notes that in Kenya women have initiated and have successfully managed a number of water supply projects (see also Clark, 1979). It would be possible, and very desirable, for representatives of the Kenyan project to visit WUP or vice versa. UNICEF in Ghana would be the first point of contact to organize such a collaborative event. She goes on to cite the work of Paula Roark, who argues that women must be included in rural water supply projects to ensure the success of such projects:

Women traditionally hold power in the learning process as teachers and purveyors. In rural water and sanitation projects, women's roles are especially strong in the specific local learning system pertaining to traditional water technology and health. (quoted in Harkness, 1982)

To ignore this power of women in the local learning process is to invite project failure.

In her own research in the Bolgatanga district, Harkness found the following with respect to women's perception of the new water supplies and the handpump maintenance function:

Clearly, women have not been selected for any particular role in the URWSP or in the WUP as it relates to water supply. Their

understanding of the project's implementation and even of its maintenance is often inaccurate or inadequate. Their clear understanding of the increased burden on their time and energy when the pump breaks down indicates their dependence on the village pump men and district GWSC repairmen. Whether men who have not had to fetch water over long distances are as responsive to pump breakdowns as women are is a question I continue to raise. The daily task of fetching water puts women in a superior position regarding surveillance of the pump ...

In this project, there is no indication that men implementing it saw any need to consider women's role as water suppliers as a determining factor in the selection of women for training programmes. Even in the simple use of the pump, men were more often given instruction than women. The right to technology only through men is negative to women's role in development particularly in water supply over which women traditionally have had independent control. (Harkness, 1982)

Historically, URWSP and, later, WUP used as the avenue of approach to the village the chief and his elders (who are all men). This body articulated local needs and problems relating to handpump maintenance, appointed a "pumpman" (this term has remained), and organized local participation in site development. This process had from the beginning a male bias. At the same time local women were available as the real experts and decision-makers in water sources, water fetching and water use. However, local protocol and project procedures (both male dominant) excluded these experts from decisions that greatly affected their labour and lives.

5.8.2 Site Development

Both women and men have contributed community labour to site development projects assisted by WUP in Upper Region. However, the organizers of these activities, usually the Water Users' Committees or village development committees, are rooted in and legitimized by patriarchal power relations. Previous WUP research has indicated the kinds of anti-women attitudes held by some, but not all, chiefs and committees regarding female participation on Water Users' Committees. Harkness' informal discussions revealed similar evidence. In her interviews in Bolgatanga, she found that few women knew of the existence or composition of their local Water Users' Committee. None knew of any women on the committees, even in cases where the chief had indicated otherwise.

This systematic blockage of the participation of women on Water Users' Committees occurs formally and informally in the daily life of the village. It is inefficient in terms of site development activities, however, for women must be taught how to utilize site improvements; they typically use the pumpsite two or three times a day almost every day of the year. Precisely because of their central role in water fetching, women are also likely to be experts regarding the continuous assessment and further improvement of technical

innovation at the pumpsite. Ultimately, it is to the advantage of the entire village to fully employ this expertise which can lead to better site development decisions.

5.8.3 Community Education

The scene is a small village in Upper Region. The CED staff of WUP have agreed to visit the village and make a public presentation on water protection. They arrive, are greeted by the chief, and wait in his compound, conversing with him, while the villagers are summoned for the meeting by the elders. The meeting takes place at the chief's meeting place. CED staff must, by tradition, address the chief and elders. Men occupy the most prominent, closest seats to the visitors. The women, however, sit in the rear of the meeting place, some unable to hear or see accurately. The message is heard and seen clearly by the men, but a percentage of women do not receive the full message. Yet it is the women who are the primary water users in the compound and at the pumpsite. This is a particular instance in which educational objectives may be thwarted by patriarchal power structures and traditions. Perhaps the women should meet separately, at their own meeting place, to ensure the message is received clearly by all women. This option is now sometimes being chosen by CED

staff and to the extent that it places emphasis on a special role for women in WUP activities, it is a step in the right direction.

Public education on water utilization and sanitation is recognized now as an essential component in order to maximize the benefits of new water supplies (Van Wijk-Sijbesma, 1979; Whyte, 1980; Falkenmark, 1982; Barrow, 1982). However, this public education must focus on women as key acceptors, users, managers and educators of water and sanitation.

"These messages", writes Mary Elmendorf (1981:95), "must be directed primarily to women, for they are the key to the realization of our goals of water and health for all"

(emphasis ours). The Community Education component of WUP, over the past year, has begun to stress women as important receivers of the message in the village level education, community health and public information activities. We recommend that they become the primary target group for CED. As Elmendorf and Isley have written:

In addition to being trained in the necessary skills for keeping water and sanitation facilities in order, women can well serve as trainers of others, particularly the young. They can also help, as collectors of essential data, in the evaluation of the systems. Since 1972, communities in Paraguay have selected local literate people, many of them women, for special training in conducting basic surveys, including assessment of attitudes toward water, excreta and garbage. (Elmendorf and Isley, 1982:230)

For WUP, this will require some refocussing of an already extensive CED approach. It will require a serious commitment to recruit a greater proportion of female VEWs to take to and receive from village women sensitive, accurate educational information. It will require a serious commitment to recruit CED staff, both cooperants and counterparts, who are women. That is not to say that men are unable to work with women; it is merely to affirm that women working with women is an optimal operational condition. It is also worth noting that women's networks, rather than "old-boy" networks, are most likely to identify skilled and committed female recruits from both Ghana and Canada for work with WUP. Two Canadian women's networks which could prove useful in recruitment are the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women and the Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women.

5.8.4 Maximizing the Benefits of Improved Rural Water Supplies

A special priority, therefore, must be accorded to village women across all WUP activities in order to maximize the benefits of improved rural water supplies in Upper Region. This is true for the organizational structure of WUP as well as the project's programming activities. Presently in Upper Region there are four cooperants, one of

whom is a woman. There are four counterparts, none of whom is a woman. There are twenty-five non-supervisory WUP staff members spread over four districts and all of these members are male. Of four new Peace Corps volunteers, two are women. Women account for only ten per cent of the personnel working on the project, yet the key players at the local level in terms of water utilization are, overwhelmingly, women. Our view is that WUP is now in a position to resolve this contradiction in its personnel composition. A vigorous policy of affirmative action throughout the organizational structure of WUP is necessary to employ a larger percentage of women. A target of 50 per cent, to be reached at the end of the next phase, does not seem unrealistic. The male bias in WUP must be reversed; the success of the project depends upon it.

WUP must at the same time develop a strategy to organize the complementary inputs which are required to fully maximize the benefit of improved supplies to rural women. Harkness has argued that training programs and other complementary inputs must be put in place for the new water supplies to make anything other than an insignificant economic impact on the lives of village women. This is now possible for WUP to accomplish. It has accumulated a base of experience and expertise and now staff can move on to more precision in their programming.

Harkness found that women in the villages of Bolgatanga district "expressed a desire for training in child care and agriculture, two spheres in which women have significant roles". She recommends a more extensive effort by WUP to promote dry season gardening specifically among women.

Women need the produce for household survival (whether eaten by the household or sold for cash to buy other food items), and vegetable production has been a traditional female activity,

writes Harkness. Although the numbers of women involved would be limited, the potential "spin-off" effects of dry season gardening on women in particular have not been fully tested or exploited by WUP. The research by Harkness also revealed high rates of illiteracy for women in the village. Literacy programs for women will be essential for them to take on more advanced roles in the economy and to fill leadership positions in social life. All of these training efforts will need to be integrated as much as possible with complementary inputs from agencies such as the Ministries of Agriculture and Rural Development and National Women in Rural Development.

In this strategy to maximize the benefits of rural water supplies to women, the role of men must not be forgotten or ignored. Increased women's participation may threaten men

individually or collectively, and they may retaliate by placing sanctions or penalties -- social, economic, cultural or political -- on women who are "moving up", who are becoming empowered by education and training and other inputs. Resentment may be directed towards WUP for intervening in the social order as it now exists. This resentment will originate in the power structures of men, the same structures which WUP has historically used as points of entry into the village.

The first step would seem to be to communicate to the men that if the women of the village do not benefit from the water maximally, the village as a whole will not derive maximal benefits. This is fundamentally an educational task. As the report of a recent international women's meeting, sponsored by the International Development Research Centre, observed:

The workshop participants also felt that men must be included in women's development process. It is men's image of women, and women's image of themselves in relation to men, that constitutes a major part of the inequality between them. Programs typically fail to recognize that "women's problems", and their solutions, are not women's alone, but stem from the total community. (Bernard, 1982:21)

At the same time, WUP staff should in their program explore new roles for village men in economic and social life which

will complement the emerging roles of women in these spheres. All human resources at the village level, male and female, must be developed to their fullest potential, for this is the richest existing local resource in the villages of Upper Region.

5.8.5 The Management of Development Assistance
and Rural Women

Managers of development assistance at CIDA employ the term "Most Severely Affected" (MSA) to refer to developing nations most seriously disadvantaged by recessive economic conditions. At the micro level of development -- the level of the village -- rural women may be said to be the Most Severely Affected by recessive economic conditions and the forces of underdevelopment. They begin from a subordinate, exploited position in local social relations. A view of international development assistance from a woman's perspective holds that aid agencies and recipient countries have managed aid through the structures of patriarchy. These structures, by definition, continue to ignore or subordinate the role of women. Advocates of the women's perspective agree that this has been a convenient alliance, an arrangement between male-dominated organizations to disburse and account for development assistance funds whose expenditures

are inherently biased towards the interests of men, both indigenous and foreign (see Cebotarev and Shaver, 1982; Dauber and Cain, 1981; Tinker, 1976).

This position, as articulated in recent studies by USAID (Elliott and Sorsby, 1979), the World Bank (World Bank, 1980), OECD (Weelies-Vagliani, 1980), and the ILO (Loutfi, 1980), underscores inequalities based on gender and asserts the equality between the sexes as a universal human right. Some thirty-five years ago the United Nations supported this position in its Declaration of Human Rights. Challenges to patriarchy, whether in Ghana or Canada, will always meet with resistance. We will be told by supporters of patriarchy that "this (patriarchy) is the way the local culture has existed for generations" and to attempt to change it is to engage in cultural imperialism.

There can be no doubt that development assistance projects, because of their scale of inputs, can and do effect major changes in local culture, the local economy and the local polity. Recognition of this power must be the starting point for assessing the potential impact of all new aid projects. However, what is the representative Ghanaian position on patriarchy? Many Ghanaian women argue that exploitation is exploitation, and that no amount of cultural history or traditional rationale can justify continued inequalities between the genders.

The present Government of Ghana advocates a philosophy of grass-roots development based on popular democracy. The Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) has strongly endorsed the work of the 31st December Women's Movement, an organization of Ghanaian housewives, market women, office workers and professionals which is "committed to promoting the self-assertion of Ghanaian womanhood, and the promotion of women's participation alongside their menfolk in the revolutionary process". The strengthening of National Women in Rural Development by the present government is also indicative of the PNDC position on women. There exists, therefore, nation-wide political support for policies and programs which equalize gender relations in Ghana.

The Canadian Government, as entrenched in the new Canadian Constitution, fundamentally supports equality rights for women in Canada. CIDA, we believe, is obliged on all these counts to choose equality, and reject patriarchy, in the case of the next phase of WUP.

However, the arguments in favour of this choice also include those factors more directly related to the day-to-day practicalities of managing development assistance. We have made the case in previous sections that program and personnel efforts by WUP must give women top priority to ensure the ultimate success of the project. The total investment by

CIDA in rural water supplies in Upper Region over the past ten years can only be safeguarded by WUP's emphasis on the role of women who are the central water collectors, water users, and water and health educators in the region. The means of ensuring project success is fundamentally a task for managers of development assistance. The embarrassment and dis-investment associated with project failure is inevitably the risk of these managers. Supporting gender equality in WUP may result in short-term project complexities which could take extra time on the part of CIDA project officers and other staff. This is partly a result of the agency's inexperience in operating outside of patriarchal structures. However, the medium-term and long-term success of the project will be ensured by this decision. In this sense, gender equality is an investment in an investment. The bottom line is whether the outputs of WUP will be achieved; without a priority on women, this will not happen.


5.8.6 A Women's Task Force

As with the village-based training and self-help priorities of WUP in its first phase, the placing of a priority on the role of women in WUP's second phase is a new venture for the Ghana Program of CIDA and for GWSC. Indeed, in a global context, it once again puts these agencies on the "leading edge" of rural water improvement

projects currently being undertaken around the world. However, more detailed study of the implications of this new priority is required than could be provided by the Mission in this report. The Mission does not recommend such additional study to delay action. On the contrary, most of the recommendations advanced in section 5.8 above can and should begin to be implemented immediately, particularly the recruitment of greater numbers of qualified women as cooperants, counterparts and Village Education Workers.

At the same time, more detailed study concerning the blockages to women's participation at the village level, the economic opportunities and educational needs of local women, and in general the broader context in which WUP's priority on women would effect short- and long-term social change, must be carried out. Accordingly, the Mission recommends the striking of a Task Force on the Role of Women, sponsored by WUP and reporting to the regional Project Steering Committee, to undertake this work. Funded by CIDA, the Task Force would bring together Canadian and Ghanaian specialists to pool their expertise. The composition of this Task Force might include the following individuals:

1. Ms. E. McAlister, Specialist in Women and Development, Policy Branch, CIDA;

2. Ms. N. Gerein, Health Specialist, Human Resources Branch, CIDA;
 3. Mrs. R.M. Harkness, Sociologist, Consultant to CIDA Upper Region Evaluation Project;
 4. Ms. M. Greenstreet, Department of Adult Education, University of Legon;
 5. Mrs. C.S. Bayor, Regional Head, Department of Community Development, Bolgatanga;
 6. Mrs. V. Munya, Director, National Council on Women and Rural Development, Bolgatanga.
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Others could be added as needed.

The life of the Task Force should be of six months to one year duration and members should meet together at least twice (once at the beginning of the process and again at the end). Each member could take responsibility for following a specific research area and for writing a corresponding chapter in the Task Force's report. Each member would have at least one field visit to the project to collect data. The work of the Task Force would be assisted by the WUP Team Leader through women staff members on the project. The