



Gender mainstreaming in water and sanitation challenges

Charity Ogbodo, Nigeria

THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT Goal (MDG) seems a big dream or may be over ambitious, but can be realized if improved water and sanitation facilities are accepted and supported by the users. If this happens there is high possibility of the facilities being financed, used and maintained. However all these will be a mirage if only men are involved in projects. The potential and value of women must be recognized and harnessed at all levels of water and sanitation project cycle if project objectives are to be met and sustainable impact realized.

In a bid to mainstream gender in all aspect of programme development in Nigeria, WaterAid and partners undertook research to understand the current status of gender with a view to position itself to address identified gaps.

Discussions happened at each sub programme because of their cultural, religious and partnership peculiarities. The research adopted largely PRA (participatory rapid appraisal) tools and targeted project beneficiaries, organisations and policy makers.

Research findings showed that obstacles to mainstreaming gender in water supply and sanitation programme/projects could be classified under cultural, socio-economic, religious, institutional skills/capacity, attitudinal and political factors.

Research methods

To develop a more appropriate research methodology while building on existing knowledge and practice, each WaterAid country programme held discussions looking more specifically at the gender gaps that exist and a review of the strategies currently employed in mainstreaming gender. State level outcomes were then harmonized on the basis of which a more detailed research was planned.

The research targeted different community groups eg community leaders, water committee leaders, children, unmarried etc and organizational leaders (e.g. Programme Coordinators, Managers, State Commissioners for Water Resources, etc).

Fieldwork was carried out in 13 WaterAid supported communities (Nacha, Munok, Yelwan Dul, Turiya, Tsohuwar Kariya, Odaleko-Odiko, Okpodom Ogore, Eja-Ibilla, Ojaba AINU, Abmighir, Gondoza, Tyemimongo and Tsua) spread over Plateau, Bauchi and Benue programmes. The study areas speak Iggede, Tiv, Tarok, Ngas, Miyawa and Hausa languages. In all research communities, major economic activity for both men and women is farming, others include petty trading, rearing of livestock and other income-generating activities.

The specific tools selected from a wide range suggested at the planning session include;

- Individual interviews/interactive discussions:
- Focus group discussions:
- Community meetings:
- Task analysis by gender:
- 24 hour routine (daily activity profile):
- Structured Observation:.
- Semi-structured interviews:
- Key informants interview:
- Access and control:

Presentation and analysis

Cultural factors

The extent of involving women in water and sanitation projects is greatly influenced by cultural beliefs. In a focus group discussion in Eja-Ibilla, the women explained that it was culturally unacceptable for a man to be sweeping the house or going to the stream to fetch water, when a woman is in the home, even if the woman is engaged with other activities. Other culturally determined roles for men and women elicited using gender role analysis in Eja-Ibilla (Oju), Odaleko-Odike (Obi), Gondoza (Logo) and Tsua (vandeikya) include the fact that women cannot dig grave or bury the dead, it is exclusive to men. Men cannot bath dead bodies only women can do so, a woman cannot decide for the family, men cannot assist or attend to a woman in child labour, infact they are forbidden from entering the room where a woman is bathing, even if they are the husbands.

In a men focus group in the above named communities, the men agreed that women could play leadership role, but that is possible only when their male counterparts are not there. A 45year old opinion leader gave his reason that a woman is under a man therefore cannot rule over a man. On who determines these roles, responses cutting across all study area include culture and tradition. According to a Nacha community member, 'this is how we were borne to meet it and it has continued and will continue'.

According to the men's group in Munok and Nacha communities, culture prohibits the woman from inheriting household properties; the woman herself is inherited after her husband's death. Even if the woman will be given some properties, what and how much she is given is decided by the eldest man in the village. In the same vein, it was found out that the boy child has the right to inherit all the

household properties because he remains in the family while the girl child does not because she goes to join another family through marriage.

On divorce in Nacha community, the Village Head stated that both have the right to divorce but if the woman divorces the man, she leaves without anything, but if the man did she leaves with her things. Other underlying cultural norms in Nacha and Munok communities include:

- A boy should not cook
- A woman should not harvest guinea corn (a major crop produced in the area)
- A boy child is born and initiated a leader
- Women cannot cook for the gods during menstrual period
- A woman cannot harvest grains because it will lead to low yield
- A woman should not dig grave or wells
- A woman can practice traditional medicine but cannot take food to the gods
- A woman cannot fetch water from some water sources when menstruating

Religious factors

In Tsohuwar Kariya community, which is Muslim dominated, the men's group gave a 24-hour clock, gender division of labour. Women do most of the domestic work while the men engage more on paid jobs. They further confirmed that non-Muslim women fetch water and go to the farm but the Muslim women do not go out (In seclusion) so the men fetch water while women do other domestic work. The men emphasized that their relationship with their wives and other women is according to the teachings and principles of Islam and that whichever position the woman occupies today is basically because of the practice and beliefs of Islam. In all project communities, it was stated that religion (God) determined gender roles. In Munok community, the men believe that a man is superior to a woman because, biblically, the woman was made out of man, the woman is the weaker vessel and the injunction for the woman to submit to the man. In Yelwan Dul community, the men think that a man is superior to the woman in all aspects except breast feeding, childcare and home management.

Socio-economic factors

Evidences from research findings proved the relationship between financial powers and decision-making in the society. If women are to have a voice in decisions regarding issues that affect them directly then they will need some level of empowerment economically.

In Tsohuwar Kariya community, the women focus group confirmed that a woman could take decision on taking her sick child to the hospital without having to wait for her husband if she has the money. In this same community, the men agreed that they now send their female children to

school since the trend have been that girl children grow up to help their old parents more than the boys. The men also said that a man takes pride if his wife can buy more clothes for herself therefore community opinion leaders have no negative view about women engaging in income generating activities. However on the types of formal jobs to be undertaken by men and women, responses across all communities and organisations interviewed was that, men could be bricklayers, doctors, engineers, grave diggers, pilots, Soldiers, managers, professionals, while the women work as receptionist, typist, cleaners, nurses, teachers, treasurers, etc.

Using access and control tool, the women were asked if a woman can slaughter a chicken belonging to the family. The answer was 'No' except if it belongs to her but if it belongs to the husband she has to ask his consent. On the other hand in Nacha community, the wife of the village chief asked his permission to offer the research team some roasted maize, which the Chief later confirmed belonged to her. 'We do not believe the woman owns anything, everything about her belongs to her husband and she should ask permission from him before using them.'

Institutional skills/capacity

Research findings showed that there was lack of skills in mainstreaming gender at all project management levels. This is evident from the fact that only 20% of all project staff had been trained and are trainers in gender. The little efforts made in mainstreaming gender at all levels were largely donor driven. For example in Oju, Obi and Munok communities, when asked the gender composition of the village water and sanitation management committee, key informants said 'we were told to make sure half of the committee members are women.' Further discussions with community members especially women showed that although the women were numerically more in the committee, it did not change the fact that their voices were not heard in committee meetings, decisions were taken regardless of their interest and even when they tried to make suggestions, the men's views always prevail. There was little knowledge about the tools and approaches to use given the uniqueness of culture, tradition and religions of project beneficiaries. At the organizational level also, findings cutting across all NGO and Government partners were that organizational perceptions of the concept of gender differ. Some define gender as sex roles as determined by societies but not limited to biological characteristics, others, an acronym differentiating human relationships in terms of sex and age, biological separation, etc. The implication is 'you do it the way you understand it'. Comparatively however, the level of awareness of gender issues is high in formal organisations and low at the community level.

Attitudinal factors

Another key challenge in mainstreaming gender discovered during fieldwork is that of the human attitude. On women

playing key leadership roles in the community especially in the water and sanitation project, the women's focus group in Ambighir, Tsua and Gondoza communities, responded that they hold their husbands in high esteem, therefore would prefer them holding key leadership positions. They added that women often do not cooperate with each other because of jealousy. Other reasons given by the women include the fact that the men will not be comfortable with that and that it is difficult to see a woman vying for a position because she feels marginalized and suppressed. This implies that the women have assumed the subordinate position and seem to be comfortable with it. In Tsohuwar Kariya community, the women confirmed that they do not have interest in participating in politics and that the men most times propose candidates for them to vote for. On property ownership right in Nacha community, a community member said, 'this is my own personal opinion, my wife can only have access to the family property if she has good reasons which are aligned with mine.' The implication of this is the inability of the woman participating in project implementation especially when it comes to cash contribution. Furthermore, on women leadership, some community members in Yelwan Dul think that success will not be achieved if women are given key leadership positions. Some of the reasons given include the fact that women are very soft and cannot handle tough issues and cannot work effectively because of the influence of their husbands, boyfriends, guardians and other sentiments. They however agreed that the women are more transparent than the men.

Political factors

In a one-on-one interview with the Coordinator and President of an NGO partner, on whether the organisation has a gender sensitive organizational policy, the response was 'sincerely we only attempt to mainstream gender in our work based on the little knowledge we have, there is no policy support by the organisation.' In another NGO partner, it was observed that all eight implementers (Volunteer field workers) were men. Of the two full time staff, the Coordinator was a man while the office caretaker was a woman. It was also discovered from interview with the General Managers of Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Agencies, that there exists no state policy on rural water supply and sanitation, let alone addressing issues of gender. In Obi and Oju local government councils, gender imbalance was observed. Staff composition of the Water and Sanitation Unit (WASU) was in the ratio of 1female: 4male and

1female: 6male respectively. Also at Oju and Obi local government Council level, there exist unequal representation in the composition of management committees. In the two councils, the committee was observed to compose of 10 men to 1 woman and 7 men to 2 women respectively.

Findings were not any different at the village level as village level committees was predetermined by project staff, hence was almost equal in all communities, key leadership positions like Chairman, Secretary except Treasurer were all held by men. A key informant in Obi local government council revealed that this has led to men's dominance in decision making, men's control of key to water point and responsibility for handling and use of money for project activities.

Conclusion

If water supply and sanitation interventions will make the desired impact that will be sustainable, the greatest challenge is to develop and use strategies and approaches that will lead to involving all groups especially women at all stages of project cycle. In Yelwan Dul community, it was gathered that women participation can be enhanced through awareness creation and creating enabling environment for all community members to actualize their potentials. Furthermore, in Odaleko-Odike, the men confirmed that women are as hard working as the men, have leadership qualities and some are more active and dedicated to a cause than the men. However, the village head of Nacha community (85 years old) said they are basically practicing the culture and tradition they were born to meet, therefore it might be really difficult to change the position of women in a hurry. This implies that gender mainstreaming has to be gradual and can be more effective if the idea comes from the end users of water supply and sanitation facilities. Much lies on awareness creation and sensitization. The result of the study was used in planning a two weeks training and is still a tool for further research and continuous monitoring at the village level. Continuous improvement on the skills acquired through constant reviews will be worthwhile.

CHARITY OGBODO (mathocholi@yahoo.com)
WaterAid, Plateau Programme Office, Jos, Plateau State.
