



No 3. Gender and Water



Photo: David Molden

Water management activities gain efficiency and impact when both women and men are involved in decision-making. Equitable access to and management of water is fundamental in promoting poverty eradication and sustainable development. This applies to women's and men's equitable access to and management of safe and adequate water, for domestic supply, sanitation, food security and environmental sustainability.

Understanding Gender in Water

Women are most often responsible for domestic and community water management in developing societies. They determine the sources of water to collect, quantity of water to be taken and the water's hygienic quality. Yet, women's decisions in regard to water management are often dictated by their social position, geographic location and increasingly by market forces. Although water supply is increasing following enhanced efforts for the MDGs, there still are many women who carry water, their whole life, keeping them out of school and out of economic development and further empowerment.

Gender relations are constructed by a range of institutions such as the family, legal systems, or the market. Usually

women are disadvantaged. An integrated approach to water resources management can help reduce disparities in equitable access to and control over resources, benefits, costs, and decision-making between men and women.

Going Mainstream

Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action including legislation, policies, and programmes in water at all levels. By this it will make women's and men's concerns and experiences an integral part of these actions, so gender equality is achieved. The mainstreaming of gender is critical to reach the Millennium Development Goals, which include targets on gender equality and empowerment of women as well as on safe water supply and sanitation. Issues of particular concern include:

- Equitable access to water supply
- Equitable access to land rights and water for productive use
- Access to sanitation
- Capacity development
- Participation and equity in decision making



Photo: Elin Weyler, SIWI

- Protection of the resource base from an indigenous perspective
- Resource mobilisation
- Private sector participation, pricing and the right to water
- Water conflicts, hazards and emergencies

Source: UN Water Policy Brief

Participatory Processes

Women and men tend to organise in different ways. The participatory processes must therefore be guided by a gender analysis that systematically explores the different impacts development has on women and men. Specific issues include:

- Power relations in communities, including divisions by age, religion, class and sex
- Intra-household and intra-family relations, guided by cultural norms
- Different constraints to participation, related to different responsibilities and different workloads
- Different abilities to participate, based on varying literacy levels, and experience of putting arguments forward to outsiders
- Perceived costs and benefits of participation
- Attention for the degree of participation of the real users at the ground level, apart from higher level stakeholders.

Source: Gender and Water Alliance

Gendered Adaptation to Water Shortages and Climate Change

Women are especially vulnerable to adverse impacts from climate change. Climate changes usually affect sectors traditionally associated with women, such as paddy cultivation, cotton and tea plantations and fishing. Prevailing social ine-

qualities mean women typically have less adaptive capacity than men and consequently bear a disproportionate burden of the climate change induced consequences. These include decreased food security, shortage of and reduced access to water resources and threatened existence, given their dependence on natural resources for their livelihoods. Poor sections of populations lack resilience to further disasters. They already live in the places most likely to suffer from drought and floods, and have no buffer for times of famine. More than men, women's daily duties, such as getting water for the household, remain in times of extreme stress.

Resource Guide

The UNDP Water Governance Facility at SIWI contributed to the production of the Resource Guide on Gender in Water Management developed by Gender and Water Alliance in co-operation with UNDP. The reference guide is available in English, French, Spanish, Arabic and Russian and will be translated and adapted to Bangla, Urdu and Hindi. Already over 10,000 have received hard copies and 150,000 have downloaded from www.genderandwater.org/page/2414.

The UNDP has also produced *Mainstreaming Gender in Water Management: A Practical Journey to Sustainability* which presents case studies and practical methodologies, consolidates available materials and gives a quick guide to accessing existing information. It is continually updated to keep abreast of new materials, information and concepts.

Learn More:

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