



Remember gender: it makes a difference

Jennifer Francis, Christine van Wijk and Dick de Jong

Strategies to mainstream gender across the entire system of water resources management are vital to bringing about change and an equitable sharing of the burdens, benefits and responsibilities.

Applying a gender perspective in water resources management results in greater efficiency, greater effectiveness, improved environmental sustainability and greater equity

Mainstreaming a gender perspective involves a process of assessing the complex relationship between productive and domestic uses of water and its implications for women and men. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's needs and experiences an integral dimension of any planned action, covering all aspects of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres. The objective: increased equity in the sharing of burdens, benefits and responsibilities among women and men.

Mainstreaming gender was a crosscutting issue in the process that led to the World Water Vision. This and the Framework of Action were launched at the 2nd World Water Forum and the Ministerial Conference held between March 17 and 22, 2000, in The Hague.

Applying a gender perspective in water resources management results in greater efficiency, greater effectiveness, improved environmental sustainability and greater equity. What is essential, however, is a commitment to the process of mainstreaming gender in the entire system

of water resources management.

Improvements have been achieved over the years, but many women and men are still a long way from achieving equity.

In an attempt to answer the questions as to what we can do better in the 21st century, the Gender and Water Major Group Session, held on March 17, offered a diverse range of activities. The aim of the day was threefold: to demonstrate the relevance of addressing gender issues and constraints, defining the gaps in the application of a gender perspective and raising commitment for proposed strategies and activities for the future.

Highlights of the gender and water session

In her Keynote Address the Vice-President of Uganda noted some progress made after Beijing's 1995 International Women's Conference. She criticised the lack of progress in addressing the female character of poverty (women make up 50% of the population but 75% of the poor) and the equitable access to education and gender equality in legal issues. She then went on to cite progress made in Uganda in the latter two areas: by law one third of local council members are female; enrolment of girls in education has doubled. However, portraying women as victims to be saved by men is getting the issue wrong and will not bring about change – enhancing equity between women and men is a matter of better development and human justice.

Her male colleague, the Minister from Luxembourg and the representative from UNIFEM in South Asia noted that gender issues had initially lagged behind in the Water Vision development process. Six organisations in water and gender – IRC, IUCN, IIAV, IWMI, Both Ends and UNIFEM joined hands.

Their aim: to achieve 'equal opportunities for women and men in



Sharing decisions – holding a discussion on health, water and sanitation at Poratal village centre, Bangladesh

Jim Holmes/Panos Pictures



Empowerment – female technicians demonstrate to villagers how a pump works. KWAHO water project, Mwambungo Mwembeni, Kenya.

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dialogue and decision-making as an integral dimension of all design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of legislation, policies and programmes for integrated water resources management.’ The strategy: gender in all the remaining vision meetings, a full gender day, gender ambassadors in all other sessions, gender represented at the Ministers Conference and ensuring that the momentum and expertise gathered at the Forum does not stop with the Water Vision, but is mainstreamed into the follow-up work.

Gender in local IWRM

In recent years good practices in operationalising gender perspectives in drinking water supply and sanitation, irrigation and the management of catchment and flow areas have developed. The Traditional Irrigation Project in Tanzania is one such project. Female and male staff and women from one of the mixed water users’ associations gave a presentation on it. In Tanzania 70% of the labour in agriculture is done by women. Locally established irrigation systems guarantee food production even in times of drought. These are threatened by overpopulation and environmental degradation, thereby putting food production and livelihoods at risk. The project addressed irrigation, soil and water conservation and strengthened local organisation with an emphasis on their gender approach aimed at more equitable roles for women and men.

The results: 26,000 farmers, 45% female and 55% male, participated in improving their irrigation and land and water management. Together they

improved almost 8000 hectares of irrigated land and 4600 hectares for land conservation. Furthermore, 166 water user groups, with female and male members, strengthened their organisational and technical skills.

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Five parallel workshops

The central issue in the session ‘From Bucket to Basin’ was: How can the water needs of those who carry the buckets be met in basin-level water management? Interesting and stimulating examples from both South Africa and India at the policy level and at the grassroots level were presented during the session organised by IWMI. The answer: have pro-poor and gender-inclusive policy and legal frameworks. The national Water Act of South Africa is a good example of policy and law that aims to redress race and gender inequities from the past. It recognises that scarce water needs to be redistributed if poor people are to improve their access to water. Furthermore, we need to create the organisational structures that bridge the gap between bucket and basin. For example, in forming Catchment Management Agencies, the South African government is attempting to organise the unorganised (who are the poor and often female farmers) in Smallholder Fora that influence decision-making. The challenge remains to facilitate the interface between the bucket and basin level.

The ‘Sanitation Taboo: Women Pay the Price’ session was organised by UNICEF. Sanitation is a major factor in the serious contamination of water resources. It also has a major gender angle in that it particularly affects girls and women. School sanitation and hygiene provides the opportunity to tackle both. The task is enormous, but not impossible when school systems, communities, governments, media and media providers, civil society and others act in partnership. In sanitation the institutional problem is that no ministry or department is keen to take up the subject – ‘everyone passes the buck to someone else’. Another institutional problem is associated with the shift of ESAs from supporting projects to supporting institutional development

and adopting the demand-based approach. Because there is no institutional demand for sanitation, it does not get onto the agenda of government and institutions. Sanitation is, furthermore, much broader than the disposal of human wastes. It has to be addressed in its broader societal context such as women who take care of the sanitation requirements of family members with HIV/AIDS and care for children.

'Vision and Action for Gender Equity in the 21st Century' focused on institutionalising gender after the Forum, stressing the fact that a gender and poverty angle for action is no separate issue, but is crosscutting. There was a presentation of a concept proposal for operationalising gender in integrated water resources management. This was prepared by IRC on behalf of the Mainstreaming Gender in The Vision Project Team through a professional alliance of those working on gender and water for people, food and nature. A mixed panel from the Global Water Partnership, ITN Philippines, IIDS/Sussex University, UNIFEM and Water Aid, led by Mr Ismail Serageldin and participants, welcomed the alliance as a formal gender (and not 'women') lobby.

Addressing gender, according to the discussions, means demystifying it, addressing value systems and cutting out the stereotyping of women as victims and beneficiaries only.

Institutional change for operationalising gender in the overall water sector is a crucial aspect to be addressed in a follow-up programme, including the transformation of senior management attitudes and arriving at a better gender balance among professionals in water management. Changing the sector begins with access of girls to basic education, said HRH Prince Willem Alexander who was present at the session. Fragmented operations in the field should be addressed.

The Vision Management Unit in Paris has pledged funding to host a workshop to operationalise the work of the water and gender alliance.

According to the Netherlands Council of Women (NVR) which organised the Bridging the Gaps session, there is no need to dwell on visions already well represented in the Dublin Principles and Chapter 18 of Agenda 21. The priority is

to translate them into collaborative action. Inputs from women water board members, government representatives, water professionals and other water-related organisations have resulted in 15 recommendations. These centre on (a) gender equality and (b) creating the right environment for participatory approaches and women's representation in water management bodies and decision-making processes.

Methodologies and tools were the theme of the fourth parallel session. A gender quiz (available in English, Spanish and Portuguese) made clear what gender is and why projects benefit from gender sensitiveness. The team, from Brazil, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Colombia and the USA presented the Methodology for Participatory Assessment. This links sustainability of drinking water and sanitation services with demand, gender and poverty approaches. It combines participatory analysis at the community level with statistical analysis at the (inter) programme level and has so far been used in 15 countries. Findings show that a combination of sustained and effective services, i.e. used and serving also the poor, comes only from a gender angle in demand, participation and empowerment. Participants had the opportunity to practice three tools hands-on.

The major challenge that remains between links of pricing and quality of service and the indicators for good governance in the communities and in institutions is how to monitor whether institutions actually practice methods that lead to gender and poverty specific demand responsiveness and participation.

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'Those who carry the buckets' – woman collecting water, Tigré, Ethiopia.

Neil Cooper/Panos Pictures

Conclusions

The strategy to place gender ambassadors in each of the different sessions of the forum and to generate feedback through daily ambassadors' meetings led to the formulation of the gender statement, which was subsequently presented at the Ministers Conference on March 21, 2000.

about the authors

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According to the ambassadors, three issues are still insufficiently recognised:

The lack of water is a determinant of poverty and contributes to the feminisation of poverty.

The economic importance of water security for productivity, family health and educational progress

That gender dimensions are not given adequate attention in programmes.

To address these issues, the Ministers were requested to take three steps into consideration:

Revise laws and policies relating to water to give men and women independent rights to land, water and representation in management organisations, from the community to basin levels.

Data concerning water services and environmental management should be gender-disaggregated, as should all future research and programme plans, where analysis and reporting builds on the strengths and interests of both women and men. Added to this, gender responsive practice examples and experiences should be widely shared.

Invest in organisation and capacity building. Capacities need to be built and officials, consultants and staff, including engineers, need to have the tools and training in order to implement gender-sensitive approaches to integrated water

management. The timing needs to follow the process of organisation and empowerment rather than what policy makers and donors impose.

In their call for action, Jennifer Francis and Jon Lane asked the Ministers for commitment on three issues:

Reallocation of budgetary resources. Analyse budgetary allocations to environmental protection and water management, and assess what proportion is currently spent on social aspects and community related activities. This proportion, which currently averages 7.5% in the more progressive water programmes, should be raised to 15% by 2005, with a view to reaching 20% by 2015.

Establish an Inter-Ministerial Sub-Committee on Gender at this Conference, whose task will be to review progress in the above areas, and report back to the next Ministerial Conference on Water in 2003. The Ministers have accepted establishing this sub-committee and many countries have already pledged their Ministers, both women and men, as delegates. Achieve 33% women's representation in FFA implementing bodies. Commitment to ensure that all bodies involved in the further development of the Framework for Action, and its practical implementation on the ground, have 33% women's representation. Added to this would be the task to ensure that the gender impacts of the FFA, from the community to the basin level, are monitored and reported at national and international levels, according to criteria agreed by the Inter Ministerial Sub Committee on Gender.

contributions

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