

Addressing gender in water and sanitation improves hygiene and sustainability, and also makes economic sense

# Water, Sanitation & Gender

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT BRIEFING NOTES



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## Why are gender issues important in the water and sanitation sector?

Women and men generally have very different roles in water supply and sanitation (WSS) activities. These differences are particularly evident in rural areas. Often women are the main users, providers, and managers of water in rural households. Women are also the guardians of household hygiene. Men are usually more concerned with water for irrigation or for livestock. Hence women tend to benefit most when access to water, and the quality and quantity of water improves. Improvements in WSS infrastructure are likely to shorten women's and girls' time spent carrying heavy containers to collect water, thereby freeing up their time for income-generating activities and school attendance, respectively.

Given their long-established, active role in WSS, women generally know about current water sources, their quality and reliability, any restrictions to their use, and how to improve hygiene behaviors. Yet for many years, efforts to improve WSS services had a tendency to overlook women's central role in water and sanitation. While women were often more direct users of water – especially in the household – men traditionally had a greater role than women in public decision-making.

It is essential to fully involve both women and men in demand-driven WSS programs, where communities decide what type of systems they want and are willing to help finance. Having both men and women involved makes sense for two reasons: First, evidence shows that women's participation is highly correlated with WSS project effectiveness. Second, the benefits from incorporating gender aspects into the

WSS sector will not only accrue to women, but also to men. Improvements in WSS infrastructure will help increase women's human capital, reduce their time constraints, allow for new income-generating activities, and improve community health. This will in turn increase the productivity of society as a whole, thereby creating new income. Hence, improving WSS services makes economic sense for men as well as for women.

## Issues to consider

- Who is voicing community preferences on the selection of WSS technologies, facility sites, arrangements for financing and management of water services?
- Are both men and women discussing water and sanitation problems and possible solutions?
- Do extension teams have men and women on them? Do they target men and women's groups separately for consultation, if local cultures differ significantly between women and men?
- Are both women and men being trained as managers of community facilities?

## How is the World Bank integrating gender in WSS?

The WSS sector has a long history of work on gender. The Water and Sanitation Program (WSP) – an international partnership of leading development agencies concerned with improving policies in this sector which is administered by the World Bank – has played a leading role in mainstreaming participation and community driven development. Today most World Bank country programs in WSS include gender-sensitive interventions. The

importance of WSS infrastructure to help empower women is highlighted in the World Bank's Gender Action Plan (September 2006).

While rural WSS – particularly hygiene and sanitation – is the main area of focus for the World Bank, work in urban WSS focuses on willingness-to-pay (WTP) and household surveys used to assess the gender-related aspects of improving access to WSS. More attention is also given to cross-sectoral issues, such as the interplay between education and sanitation. Both the World Bank's Agriculture and Rural Development group, as well as its Water Resources Management group are currently scaling up gender-related activities in the WSS sector.

## Gender-mainstreamed projects in WSS

Below are three examples of innovative approaches to integrate gender issues into WSS projects:

### Mabule village, South Africa: Women in sanitation and brick-making project

Mabule village, South Africa, suffered from high prevalence of cholera and other diseases due to an unsanitary environment. The nearest water source was 10 km away and the sanitation facilities were inadequate and unhygienic, which made it difficult for women and girls to visit them. The Mabule Sanitation Project responded to these problems through a joint venture by the Department for Water Affairs and Forestry, the community and the Mvula Trust, an NGO. An important component of the project was brick-making to produce materials for latrine construction and as an income-generating activity.

The project was run by a committee that was elected by the community; women who

had recently completed a Department of Health hygiene training program filled 8 out of 10 seats. An analysis of the gender division of labor helped community members understand the importance of female contributions to the community as well as to the project.

The outcomes in terms of health, women's empowerment and community development are encouraging. Today the community enjoys clean latrines, not to mention more dignity and privacy for all individuals when going to the toilet. Acceptance of women's leadership and collaboration between men and women has increased. Furthermore, women in the community have learned to manage a full project cycle. Finally, the brick project employs 10 people and provides the community with affordable bricks. Related income-generating activities have followed, raising incomes for both women and men.

Key to the project's success was that community members were sensitized to gender issues, the interests and welfare of both women and men were built into the project, and the project created an environment that enabled women's participation. This intervention was done in an inclusive, unthreatening manner to see if and how gender roles and responsibilities could be altered.

#### **Indonesia: Water and Sanitation for Low Income Communities Project (WSLIC)**

This community-driven development project uses several approaches to give women in Indonesia a voice in WSS decision-making. Communities plan and implement WSS improvements of their choice. The project included rules aimed at widening community participation in decisions, specifically targeting women for greater project success. This resulted in the formation of community decision-making committees which were required to have a gender-balanced membership.

A social mapping of all households was undertaken to classify them based on socioeconomic status and head of household. The aim was to ensure that WSS infrastructure was located where it

benefited poor and female-headed households, not only relatively better-off, male-headed households. Since men had a tendency to dominate mixed-sex meetings, separate community meetings were held for women to identify priorities and formulate proposals. Finally, the WSLIC required WSS projects to demonstrate equity in three key areas – community processes, plans for service improvement, and the composition of water management committees – before being eligible to receive project assistance. Monitoring for such equity was undertaken at several stages of the project cycle, with further disbursements of funds linked to satisfactory performance.

Evidence shows that women's preferences are reflected in the design of WSLIC community facilities, and that women gained greater voice in water management committees through increased access to training. However, the experience also shows that gender aspects need to be incorporated into all project stages, including the project operation manuals, technical guidelines, supervision and monitoring systems. If gender-inclusive procedures are institutionalized with local governments, the possibility of achieving permanent change is greater.

#### **Ghana: Gender-sensitizing a rural water project in Samari-Nkwanta village**

This WSS program came about as a response to the serious infestation of guinea worm, which had existed among community members for several decades. The Samari-Nkwanta Water and Sanitation Project started in 1992 as a part of the Ghana Rural Water Project (GRWP). Since then the project has moved away from its initially technologically-driven focus to a community-based, demand-driven focus, acknowledging the high correlation between gender and poverty reduction. The project supplied the village with two boreholes fitted with hand pumps, two public Ventilated Improved Pit latrines, and a urinal.

Thanks to the project, the village saw a shift from male-dominance to a more equitable sharing of power, particularly within the Water and Sanitation Committees. It also

increased women's free time as, on average, women saved five more hours per day to use productively on their farms and households. In addition, female school attendance increased; girls now make up 53 percent of primary school students, compared to 43 percent in 1995. Finally, the guinea worm is eradicated among the entire water user group. Key factors for successful project design were ensuring that men and women were equally represented on the Water and Sanitation Committees and received training to support their participation, entrusting men and women with responsibility for the water system's maintenance and operation, and fostering sensitivity to women's concerns within the community.

### **Resources**

Mukherjee, N. and van Wijk, C., 2003. *Sustainability Planning and Monitoring in Community Water Supply and Sanitation*. IRC, Water and Sanitation Program, World Bank. <http://www.wsp.org/publications/mpa%202003.pdf>

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United Nations, 2006. *Gender, Water and Sanitation: Case Studies on Best Practices*. [http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/sdissues/water/casestudies\\_bestpractices.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/sdissues/water/casestudies_bestpractices.pdf)

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World Bank, 2006. *Gender Equality as Smart Economics: A World Bank Group Gender Action Plan (Fiscal Years 2007-10)*.