

Incorporating gender issues in water and sanitation increases chances for hygienic practices and leads to sustainability

Water, Sanitation & Gender Equality

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT
BRIEFING NOTES



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

Women and men usually have very different roles in water and sanitation activities; these differences are particularly pronounced in rural areas. Women are most often the users, providers, and managers of water in rural households and are the guardians of household hygiene. If a water system breaks down, women, not men, will most likely be the ones most affected, for they may have to travel further for water or use other means to meet the household's water and sanitation needs.

Women have a strong incentive to acquire and maintain improved, conveniently-located water facilities, since they often spend more time collecting water. Hence, women and girls tend to benefit most when water quality and quantity improves. They tend to take shorter trips carrying heavy containers, they may have more time for income-generating activities and they are able to spend more time in school.

Given their long-established, active role, women usually are very knowledgeable about current water sources, their quality and reliability, and any restrictions to their use. They will also be key players in implementing improved hygiene behaviors.

Men are usually more concerned with water for irrigation or for livestock. While women are often more direct users of water, especially in the household, men traditionally may have a greater role than women in public decision-making. Because of these different roles and incentives, it is important to fully involve both women and men in demand-driven water and sanitation programs, where communities decide what type of systems they want and are willing to help finance.

Issues to consider

- Are both men and women involved in community decision-making for water and sanitation services?
- Who is voicing community preferences related to the selection of water and sanitation technologies and siting of facilities?
- Are both men and women discussing hygiene problems and possible solutions?
- Do extension teams have men and women on them?
- Are both women and men being trained as caretakers of community facilities?

How is the World Bank integrating gender in water and sanitation?

The World Bank is using new, innovative approaches to integrate gender issues into water and sanitation projects.

The design of the *Morocco Rural Water and Sanitation Project* took into account men's and women's different priorities. Men, who were predominantly consulted in earlier projects, were interested primarily in constructing rural roads and ensuring a supply of electricity, while in many villages, women were concerned mainly with the lack of potable water.

In much of Morocco, women and young girls fetch the water, often from as far as five kilometers away. As a result, girls often miss school. In one village a recent survey found that primary school attendance by girls more than doubled a year after the new water supply system began operating.

The Ghana Second Community Water and Sanitation Project is another example of the World Bank adopting an innovative and gender-sensitive approach.

The project is emphasizing gender-sensitive design and community-driven activities, using several methods. For example, water and sanitation committees must have balanced representation of women and men. The number of gender-balanced water and sanitation committees is a key performance measure for the project. In addition, a women's representative is required to sign community project documents, such as the project application form.

Resources

Linking Sustainability with Demand, Gender, and Poverty: a study in community-managed water supply projects in 15 countries. Bruce Gross, Christine van Wijk, Nilanjana Mukherjee. Water and Sanitation Program. 2000.

Gender in Water Resources Management, Water Supply and Sanitation: Roles and Realities Revisited. Christine van Wijk-Sijbesma. International Water and Sanitation Center. 1998.

Toolkit on Gender in Water and Sanitation: Monica S. Fong, Wendy Wakeman, and Anjana Bhushan. The World Bank. 1996.

The toolkit is available online:
www.worldbank.org/gender/resources/wstkt4.pdf