

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT: GENDER, EFFICIENCY AND SUSTAINABILITY

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KEY ISSUES:

- Gender aspects of water supply and sanitation are evident, but it is not clear how mainstreaming gender would make the work of sanitation professionals more efficient, effective and sustainable.
- For people to change their own gender ideology is not impossible, but if related to taboo subjects such as most sanitation issues are, it needs specific inputs and attention.
- Participatory IWRM development has major empowering effects on poor women, girls, boys and men.
- By including women's knowledge and expertise, water management efforts will be highly effective and efficient.
- Women and vulnerable groups are not only victims, they also are capable actors, and their work needs to be recognised.

INTRODUCTION

Water for people: water supply and sanitation have many gender aspects, several of them will be obvious to most water practitioners. Even so, these aspects are not often given an important role in water and sanitation programmes, because the positive effect on efficiency, impact and sustainability are not always clear.

Water for food: for agriculture, such as irrigation also is a field in which women play a major role, which is hardly recognised. All over the world women are farmers, not always in cash crops, but feeding the majority of the population. Interventions in agriculture for example by introducing irrigation, are usually directed at male farmers, leaving women farmers behind. Women may lose rights to land in such interventions. Health, nourishment and self-reliance decrease, because the work of women is not valued, or not even seen.

Water for the environment: because men and women have different tasks and different rights to water, it is important to take the interests of both into account. Many women depend on the natural environment for the water for their families. Decreasing quantity and quality of the water available to them is a risk water professionals need to take into account.

Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is a way to take these different water-needs all as seriously, and relate them to each other. In practice this is often difficult because of a sectoral approach, in which responsibilities are divided and coordination is avoided. On the ground for poor women and men, IWRM is a daily reality, because the available water is scarce, and decisions about its use have to be rational. Drinking water comes first, then the water for bathing and cattle, then the water for crops. Water for environment is to be conserved and protected as much as possible for the future of the surroundings and of the children.

This paper takes gender studies in development technology as a starting point. I will explain three important concepts: gender, gender ideology and empowerment.

GENDER

Gender has to do with men and women, the relations between them, the asymmetric power differences, hierarchy, and difference in participation in decision-making. Gender is not just the difference between men and women, it also includes age differences because they have a large influence on the position of a person. In most contexts an older woman will have a large say in what younger women of the household should do or not do, also in the Arab and Mediterranean regions.

This is also a gender issue. Children are boys and girls, and they are brought up differently, the relations between them and between them and the elder people are gender relations as well. Men and women have different responsibilities, in the house but also in the village or community. Differences and power positions depend also on religion, socio-economic class, caste, ethnicity, urban or rural location. So when we use the concept gender relations, we must not forget the differences between women and women and the differences amongst men. Gender has a different form in different cultures, places, and also changes over time. Like culture, gender is dynamic, if people want to change their own culture, it will change. The key word for gender in relation to development is change.

GENDER IDEOLOGY

Important is that every person by his or her upbringing knows how she or he should behave. That does not mean that persons actually behave like that, but they know the correct behaviour for their position, their age. That is called gender ideology. Women, like men know what they are supposed to do, and even if they would prefer to live in more equality, it is difficult to put aside the division of tasks which have been learnt from youth onwards. Gender ideology is an internalised attitude, it is between the ears of every person, and it is different per culture. We are hardly aware of it, it is a set of usually unwritten rules, which we stick to, even if we try to change. In development efforts, gender ideology does not only play a large role with the so called target group or beneficiaries, it is also part of the thinking of professionals, of those who develop programmes for improvement of water management, be it for food, for people or for the environment.

In sanitation gender ideology plays a particularly important role. To understand why changes in gender relations in sanitation are very hard to achieve, we need to include gender ideology in the analysis of our work. To change gender ideology is not totally impossible, but to change gender ideology regarding a taboo subject such as most aspects of sanitation, is very hard. All the rules, written or unwritten related to it, will be hard to change. It is therefore not right to pretend as if it is easy to mainstream gender in all sanitation related development efforts. Neither should it be considered impossible, because there are many examples of how Governmental and Civil Society Organisations make real changes and whose lessons learnt we can make use of. These relate to my third concept: empowerment of women and poor categories.

EMPOWERMENT

Empowerment is the process in which categories of people and also individuals manage to improve their own position, possibly with some external support. Empowerment has four interdependent elements, which are the social, the economic, the political and the physical aspects. In sanitation all four elements are strongly present.

1. Social empowerment relates to the self image women (and other people) have, and how they are seen by the rest of the family, in the community, the society at large. When women (or for example low cast groups) are seen as second class citizens, to change this is social empowerment. In water supply and sanitation usually the lowest people and women are responsible for the work most looked down upon: carrying heavy loads of water, cleaning of toilets, removing of sanitary waste and other solid waste, caring for sick people, etc. If these activities can be considered as most important for the health of the families and the communities instead of just dirty work, the position and social status of those who do this work will rise. If this work is done by all instead of just the lowest categories of people, it will also have a great empowering effect.
2. Economic empowerment deals with work and income and the decisions related to work: can a person decide her or himself which work to do, and can she or he decide about how the income and other benefits will be spent? Work in agriculture is usually not paid for, if women work on their family's land. If women or poor men earn an income in money their situation can change, and if they can decide about the spending of it, one can call this empowerment. In this world nearly everywhere it is found that women spend their income for the household and for the children, whilst men are more inclined to spend it for themselves first, and what is left is for the household.

3. Political empowerment does not particularly relate to political parties, but rather to the right to organise one selves, the right to participate in democratic institutions, but also in village water user committees. In general it can be said that the more hierarchical a society is, the lower the position of women. Related to water supply sanitation, the political aspects of empowerment are important for women, because it will mean that they will have a say in decision making, and not just take part in heavy and dirty work. If they will be able to influence development efforts, they will feel empowered.
4. Physical aspects of empowerment are the right to decide about one's own bodies, about one's sexuality, the number of children and the spacing between them, and the right to physical dignity with regards to sanitation facilities available to women, especially. Also the right to safety and security, that means: not to be harassed or even raped when in need of a toilet during the night or when walking far for water.

It is important to realise that these four sides to empowerment should not be seen as empowering if in isolation. What good does an income do to a person, if she can't decide where to spend it on, because she has to hand it to her husband or mother in law. And if she would not give it, she may be beaten. Her husband may decide to buy alcohol for the money and more violence results. So, economic empowerment is not enough if in isolation. Only if women's self-confidence is positive and they can avoid violence, for example, or if they can influence development efforts, can take part in decision-making, can they feel empowered. Groups and individuals who are at the lower side of the hierarchy, empower themselves, if they are convinced, and if they are able. They can be helped by convincing them and by giving them instruments for change such as education and forming of all categories, not just those who need to be empowered, and high quality education which increases their opportunities. Improved laws and regulations can also mean support to a process of empowerment.

IMPORTANT GENDER ISSUES RELATED TO WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION

There are many gender issues in sanitation which need to be taken into account to improve development efforts. Many deal with the different task men and women have, in fact just about all tasks related to sanitation are women's duties. And sanitation issues also relate with gender ideology as a major obstacle, blocking change. The drive of women and other poor categories to empower themselves can be utilised to overcome the hindrance of gender ideology.

Women are Responsible for Water in the House

Water is heavy and it flows down, so it always has to be carried upwards, which is hard work, if not mechanised. Women always fill their containers a bit more than what they can carry. Women often feel proud of their heavy loads, that is part of gender ideology. Even so, accidents and ailments resulting from the carrying of heavy loads are common. In case of drought or flood women remain responsible for water, and have to go even further to find it, or compromise by using less and less clean water, which influences the hygienic situation of the household.

Women are Responsibility for Hygiene at Home

Even though the responsibility for cleanliness and hygiene should be with all, in reality it are the women of households and also of villages who are seen as the cleaners of the yard, the house, the kitchen, the bathroom and the toilet facilities. In those situations women are usually also responsible for getting water to the house, from far away, from less far, or from close by. Both the cleaning and the fetching of water takes a lot of her time. There is a trade-off between hygiene and saving water. To save water in a way that does not lessen the cleanliness of the house and sanitary facilities, needs a lot of understanding of germs, the spreading of dirt, and hygiene. Women suffer more themselves from unhygienic situations. And women do all this in a context of the household, where there are also men and children.

Summarizing: women are responsible for the hygiene of themselves, their children and men folk; women have to do the work for all of them; and women suffer when they themselves have negative influence of bad hygiene, by getting ailments and diseases, but also if their children are ill, which means extra work for them. Also when their men folk, and parents are ill that also gives them extra

work, and more water to carry. So women are at the centre of hygiene for all. Either way, with or without diseases, it means a lot of work for them. Not all women are in the same position, the younger women in the household have more duties than the senior ones.

Within many Asian homes, a mother in law, that is the wife or the mother of the so called male head of the household, has an important say about her daughters in law. If elderly women are not conscious about germs, about cleanliness and the need for it, she may give her daughter in law the wrong instructions. I have witnessed in South Asia, that daughters in law, who clean everything and who cook the food, were told not to waste the water by washing her hands all the time. The hand washing was seen as a personal luxury which she was not allowed, instead of a necessity for the health of the whole family. This is again an example of gender ideology: daughters in law are supposed to have a hard time (similar to the mother in law when she was in that position long ago), and hand washing is not part of that.

Women are Responsible for the Sick and for the Elderly

Both men and women can get ill, but women are the caretakers perse. Hygiene becomes doubly important when there are sick family members who could infect the others. Extra water is needed, and a lot of extra work needs to be done. Gender ideology prescribes that women do all this, there is no other real reason. The same is true for the elderly, with the difference that sick people in the house should be an exceptional situation, whilst to get old will happen to all who are healthy and lucky.

Women's Reproductive Work

During the time of being pregnant, giving birth and breast feeding, the risks of getting infections is high. All women will try to avoid that by giving lots of attention and spending extra energy in hygiene. The direct relation with the quality and quantity of water available during that time, and the fact that she will not always be able to get it, makes her very vulnerable. Maternal mortality is directly related to hygiene, and hygiene to sanitary facilities and their cleanliness.

Infant mortality still is a large problem in Africa and Asia, and often related to lack of hygiene, or death by water-related diseases such as malaria and diarrhea.

IMPORTANT GENDER ISSUES IN AGRICULTURE

Division of work can be very efficient. But the work of all should be valued. Often the work of women is valued less. Not just in agriculture. In the Netherlands, like in many places, women still earn about 80% for the same work as men do. The massive work women do in agriculture is not recognised. If it is unpaid, one even tends to say that they don't work. Because the work is not recognised, women also have no rights to land, and also not to water, because these two are often related. As written above, this leads to malnutrition, bad health and poverty.

Efficiency

Women and men do different work in agriculture. It is crucial for both groups to be consulted in case of development in agriculture. It is often the case that only male farmers are involved, and the richer farmers at that. In such situations a lot of valuable knowledge and expertise remains unused and big mistakes can be made. Men often don't know at all what women do, where they get the water for the animals or for the vegetables and the family in the different seasons. Women have knowledge about these sources. It is not efficient and a waste of resources if women farmers' knowledge is not tapped.

One objective of IWRM is efficient and conscious use of water for the different purposes, preserving enough water for the future. Without awareness related to gender aspects, efficient water use is unlikely to take place.

SPECIAL POSITION OF REFUGEES AND HOMELESS VICTIMS OF DISASTERS

Refugees are in a most vulnerable position, and therefore women, children and men, need to be supported in their need for water and sanitary facilities. Women in refugee camps often already have

been raped in the war-situation, they need extra protection. Therefore it is surprising that most literature about refugees is gender neutral. I want to ask special attention for women in these situations. Similar is the position of women in places of floods and other disasters. They remain responsible for the water and hygiene in the place they have their temporary living, but have to do without the minimal necessary resources and often in a hostile environment.

WHY FACILITIES ARE NOT ALWAYS USED

There are lots of reasons why water points and toilets which have been constructed are not used. Sometimes they are abandoned after they have become very dirty and no one feels responsible for cleaning. In urban situations, especially in slums, taps and toilets are very scarce, but when constructed, the problems about cleaning and maintenance begin. If a keeper is appointed with the responsibility, he or she needs to be paid. Users have to pay per month or per time they use taps, and the poorest are left out, because they can't afford the costs.

SUSTAINABILITY

Men and women have different reasons to pay importance to the long term in the preservation of water. Women need strong and sustainable water facilities, because one day without them means a serious problem. Women often are inclined to pay for water and sanitation services, as long as they can count on them. For agriculture both men and women need the land to reproduce itself, but women generally have less access to fertiliser and other costly inputs, which makes them more aware of natural ways to sustain the land and water resources. Of course both men and women should feel responsible for their environment and for the future of their children, but in practice women take the long term more seriously. Water professionals who involve women as well as men will find their work more sustainable.

SOLUTIONS

To involve women and men, including the poor and those of ethnic minorities, in water management for different uses, integrating them (IWRM) will prove not so difficult, and very rewarding. After all, which water managers want their work to be expensive, to have little impact and to have disappeared after some time?

Finding solutions for improved water supply, hygiene and sanitation need to take gender ideology into account: women feel more responsible than men for maintaining taps, and cleaning sanitary facilities.

Participation, of all involved is often suggested as a solution for water and sanitation programmes, but it is only adequate if the prevalent gender ideology is taken into account. Women and men need to be invited to tell their opinions and ideas about who is responsible for what, their suggestions for location, style, maintenance, cleaning, payments, etc. It cannot be assumed that the outcomes of such participation is the same everywhere.

All the cases that taps or toilets have been constructed and not used or misused, need to be avoided, and reasons have to be found out beforehand, so that changes can be planned right from the start.

It may be clear that women, although the worst victims of poor sanitary and water situations, also are the most important actors in this field. They have the responsibility, the understanding and knowledge and most interest in clean services and the health of the families. They need to be involved as main actors. Men need to be involved too, because all should be responsible, not just women.

Gender ideology is not easy to change. Only if people are aware of it and really want to change this, could a beginning be made towards more equal responsibility and efficient sanitary management. SSHE (School Sanitation and Hygiene Education) is therefore a crucial beginning, where both boys and girls can be involved in keeping their own toilets clean. It would be a missed chance if only girls, or only mothers are involved in cleaning school toilets.

In practice it will not turn out to be difficult to involve women as well as men in water management. It is a matter of doing so, inviting women to meetings, taking them seriously, giving them the clear

impression that their contribution is appreciated. Meetings need to be held in places where it is easy for women to come, and at times which are convenient for them, often late in the night.

REFERENCES (apart from own experience)

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