

E-Conference 2: Case studies

CASE STUDY PRESENTATIONS

A total of 51 cases were presented to the conference over the first three weeks of the proceedings. Presentation varied according to the source. In some instances, substantial research reports were submitted. A large number of other cases consisted of brief descriptions of one or two paragraphs, extracted from publications produced by organisations whose staff were participating.

A preliminary examination reveals that, of these cases:

- 39 focused on drinking water supply and sanitation
- 16 on agriculture and food production
- 3 on conservation and water for nature
(There was sometimes overlap, hence the anomalies in the figures.)

In terms of geographical distribution:

- 27 of the cases described situations in Asia
- 14 in Africa
- 3 in Eastern Europe
- 2 in Latin America
- 5 were global in scope

FOCUSES OF THE CASES PRESENTED

The large number of cases presented offered comprehensive insight into the multitude of issues and challenges within the area of gender mainstreaming in IWRM. This is now a valuable collection of reference material.

- The agriculture cases focused on irrigation and access to water by female farmers.
- The drinking water cases broadened the focus to include sanitation, hygiene, emergencies, flood control, refugee situations.
- A couple of the cases analysed organisations dealing with water and gender.

Specific focus of some of the cases submitted:

1. Cases discussed during the conference

- A tool for the design of irrigation schemes
- The Gender Performance Indicator
- Women's participation in water conservation in India
- Women's lack of participation in the management of irrigation in Southern Africa
- The links/constraints posed by the intertwined issues of gender, caste and poverty in India
- Women's leadership in finding solutions to the water crisis in Ukraine
- Often, men make decisions while women implement
- The constraints to implementation of the national gender policy in South Africa
- Women's lack of involvement in decision-making and class differentiation in Gujerat, India
- Factors hampering women's participation in decision-making processes in Sri Lanka
- The need to involve men along with women in hygiene education

2. Cases Deferred to the final GWA e-conference to be held later this year

- Evidence that basing projects on traditional gender roles is a risky strategy
- Women sometimes have different opinions from men on water-related issues
- Lack of skills in public participation results in increased water-related burdens for women
- 'Vulnerable sectors' (the poor, women etc) are not homogenous
- Cultural practices can change
- Traditional gender roles can deprive people of survival strategies
- Consultation should be scheduled at times convenient to women

- A rise in women's self-confidence can lead to general community development
- Poor women can lead the way in water conservation
- Women are often the best and most effective agents for change and for poverty alleviation

DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The quality of participation was extremely high. Many of our participants had an impressive wealth of experience on which to base their observations; some were in-depth researchers who raised probing issues. They took a great deal of trouble to write long and well-thought out analyses of the issues that lay under the case material presented, and of their reflections on their working experience in this field. A choice was therefore made to use the opportunity to thrash out some of the thorny fundamental issues that were raised, rather than to find easy consensus.

However, the large number of cases made it problematic for many busy participants to keep up with the discussion agenda. It was difficult to read all the material, digest it, and make contributions to the debate in a timely fashion. A number of conference attendees requested that the case-material and discussion be posted on a website for future analysis. This has now been done, and it is expected that the process of drawing out conclusions from these cases will continue for some time - including during the final GWA e-conference.

Issues Discussed

It is not possible to do justice to the debate within the space constraints of this summary. What is being presented here are just some of the highlights.

1. Specific Tools for Mainstreaming Gender (Agriculture)

The presentation of the Gender Performance Indicator provided insight into how such tools could be valuable in gender mainstreaming within the water sector. However, some participants raised questions as to whether 'gender tools' or 'toolkits' may not fail to take account of specific local complexities and lead to ineffective or inappropriate strategies. Contributors noted that there should be a distinction between 'descriptive' tools and 'prescriptive tools'. Three of the final contributions are quoted here since they sum up the main thrust of the discussion:

'I agree with the statement about tools for doing gender not being prescriptive. My experience is that our desire is to simplify things, but at the end of the day people, the environment, and their interactions are complex. Having said that, similar issues did seem to arise in the cases. So presumably broad checks and guides that could lead people through uncovering the different systems and traditions that make up societies and the how, why and when they interact with water and its wider environment would be more useful than prescriptive tools.'

'While I agree that there is a risk of them being prescriptive and therefore limited given the social and cultural diversity within which gender issues are situated, I have often found that the people who are finally responsible for programme/project design and implementation are generalists or specialists from other streams and find the generic and specific questions that some tool kits offer very useful. In the absence of practical guides they find this area of work complex, political, threatening or simply too abstract. Tool kits can serve as starting points which then need to be adapted to meet the needs of specific activities/projects. It is important that ideas are shared widely, across disciplinary boundaries, to ensure that they inform practice and tool kits help serve this purpose.'

'Generic understanding on many gender issues has become substantive by now, and the case studies confirmed this. It is time to move forwards towards action, for example by requesting answers from policy makers on our pertinent questions. As any situation is different, I agree one needs to start with applying tools for analysis. However, it should not stop with 'more understanding', but be linked to action that, as we sufficiently know by now, had positive impacts in similar conditions elsewhere. It is time to request policy makers and others to apply performance indicators that are developed for that purpose.'

2. Dual farming systems (agriculture)

The case that was presented also led to a discussion of the need to differentiate between two varieties of farming practices in rural areas of the developing world. Circumstances differ where women own or control their land, and where they are labourers on land owned or controlled by male family members. This is important, contributors maintained, in the design of efforts at gender mainstreaming in the context of irrigation systems. A number of participants made the point that there is an increase in the labour contributions of women in irrigated farming in some parts of the world (Southern Africa and Senegal were particularly identified).

One contributor noted: 'Let's not forget that even in dual farming systems, women may have different needs and priorities for water than men. This includes not only different timing or application of water in irrigation, but also use of water in the irrigation system for other purposes (including domestic use).'

3. Gender, class, caste, poverty and inequality

Here, the conference took time to mull over an exceedingly difficult question. Lack of access to water leads to poverty, and is an indicator of poverty - hence women are among those disadvantaged. But wider structural inequalities, such as caste and class, are also responsible for the lack of access some women and men experience. Is gender mainstreaming in the water sector sufficient to overcome wider structural inequalities that deprive some sectors of society of access to this basic necessity. Or would the gains achieved by gender mainstreaming be undermined by other social inequalities? Participants posted cases to illustrate this dilemma.

One participant asked: 'Can issues related to gender inequality be disassociated from other issues of social inequality? Do irrigation projects need to consider and take into account these beyond equitable management of water? How feasible would it be to address some of these issues within the scope of irrigation projects?'

The issue of caste in South Asia was a particular sticking point in this discussion. A number of participants noted that structural inequalities, such as those entrenched in the caste system, could undermine efforts at 'empowerment of communities'. The issue, and suggestions for tackling it, were well put in the following paragraph, that deals with Nepal:

'Caste discrimination has adversely affected the optimum distribution of drinking water to all the populace. Social tensions, and occasional cuttings of the pipeline by the upper caste people are also not unusual. As correctly indicated, such deep-rooted and complex structures of inequality cannot be eliminated just having social empowerment as a conditionality or goal of the project... In such a situation, instead of common taps for all the settlements, few more taps can be set up for different caste groups, together with few common taps as well. Train the people particularly from the lower castes on operation and maintenance, so they will automatically come into the picture, and reduce the discriminatory process on a gradual and amicable basis. The other measure is to form the users committees on a proportionate basis representing people from all the caste groups and minorities...'

Another contributor pointed out that the issue of water and inequality was being reconceptualised in discussions on sustainable development and poverty:

'Providing water or irrigation schemes without at least starting to put in place routes to address the inequalities is consigning the scheme to failure in the long, if not medium term. It seems to me that there is now beginning to be funding made available for projects that address this whole bundle of issues together. This is an important change. What it also means is that projects no longer become labelled as irrigation or water supply or sanitation projects, instead they are to 'reduce vulnerability of communities' or 'working towards sustainability. Obviously there are sub-projects focussed on particular areas such as irrigation/sanitation/water supply, but they are strongly linked with a wider picture. I think this is interesting as it may mean new groups of people working together...'

This was also illustrated with material posted on a 'sustainable livelihoods approach' to water management. The material focused on the 'secure water' research project, which is supported by the British government. It stated:

'The purpose is to increase a better understanding of water-poverty linkages amongst water sector practitioners and policy makers with an aim to enhance their capacity to design interventions that address more realistically the goals of water security and poverty alleviation.'

This material made no mention of gender, so perhaps it is worth exploring whether gender mainstreaming should not be blended into these new approaches and initiatives.

4. Institutional change

Participants stressed the need for changes within organisations that tackle water management at a practical level. Structural inequalities and biases that resulted in lack of access for some social groups were also reflected in the staffing and attitudes of official and non-governmental organisations, they pointed out. Some participants felt there was a need for urgent demands for change there.

CONCLUSION

This conference was quite a challenge for all involved. Producing cases for examination, reading the masses of material that resulted, reflecting on it, and providing well-thought-out analysis was a challenge for participants. It was also a challenge for the organisers, who could not quite predict what material would be generated, what issues brought forward, and how the agenda should therefore be structured.

As moderator, I would like to thank all those who were involved for their very worth-while contributions and their support. I think, in the end, we participated in a very useful exercise, one that will have results in time to come. We have generated a good collection of material for further analysis and discussion, and started to jointly confront some of the more in-depth issues related to gender mainstreaming in IWRM. I have had many messages from those who did not actively participate saying that they valued the postings very much, since they lacked information on this issue.

Congratulations are due to the members of this conference for their patience, commitment and good humour.