

E-Conference 1: The State of the Art

Phase 1 - Introductions

This phase of the conference brought into view a large number of extremely experienced and committed people from around the world, the majority of whom were already working on gender mainstreaming in the water sector. Participants came from various parts of Asia, Africa, Europe, the Middle East and North America. They included a significant number of local government officials, employees of international NGOs and grassroots organisations, researchers, gender specialists and agriculture specialists. They represented all the sectors -Water for Food, Water for Nature, Water for People. There was a good mix of male and female participants.

Almost all participants said they had come to the conference to learn from others' experiences, and many mentioned, in particular, experiences in gender mainstreaming at local levels. In their introductions, they generally expressed a strong belief in gender mainstreaming as a strategy towards addressing the issues of poverty and gender inequality. A main concern was for examining concrete, practical methodologies for implementation of gender mainstreaming.

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Phase 2 - Concepts

Participants agreed in the main with the definitions of the relevant concepts presented in the background papers.

A major concern was that actors implementing projects on the ground were the ones who were unclear what these concepts implied. It was therefore suggested that the GWA should aim to clarify these concepts to other levels of actors within the water sector.

Some of the points stressed were:

- In many cases the interpretation of this concept "gender mainstreaming" is very different on the ground. By using (or abusing) the term gender mainstreaming many projects feel that they are "covered" from a gender perspective. In reality gender is being side-streamed rather than mainstreamed with few project managers or implementors able to articulate what they actually mean or do under the heading of gender mainstreaming.
- In most of the societies in the world gender relations are patriarchal and women are made to be subordinate to men, which is reflected in differences and inequalities within the family as well as in the community. Women's subordination is not due to biological differences between them and men but constructed through the strong process of socialization. As a result women are marginalized, deprived and excluded from social, economical, cultural and political processes.
- Mainstreaming gender in relation to water is not a simple task - it requires us to tackle a deeply entrenched system of gender roles. Experience in a number of countries, organisations and struggles around the world reveals that there is always a danger, in dealing with gender issues, that they are seen by those in power to be "women's issues" and are relegated to a side line, to be dealt with by women. Gender mainstreaming means much more than having one person on the team designated as the "gender person."
- It is very important that we understand the term "gender" to refer not simply to men and women, but to the social roles assigned to men and women. Gender differences are complex and subtle -they are determined by cultural, religious and historical practices. They affect the roles that men and women play in the household, in the work place, in political, religious and

intellectual life. The lack of women in leadership positions in the water sector is determined by the differing social expectations and demands on men and women.

- Women are often conceptualised as key USERS and managers of household water. This is inaccurate. Men get priority in water use at the domestic level, though women are the COLLECTORS of water. The current approach entrenches stereotypes, placing further burdens on women. It does not result in an improvement of their situation.
- By Gender Mainstreaming I understand that we need to balance the participation/decision making of men and women in various programs and projects at all levels. In general men have always been at the forefront and have been the decision makers so there is a need to stress the increase in the participation of women, which would then lead to a more balanced approach.
- Mainstreaming gender requires us to ensure that, in ALL programmes undertaken by an institution, the gender issues are dealt with. A poverty sensitive approach requires ALL programmes to be examined for the impact on poverty eradication.
- The development programmes in the past many decades have not addressed the causes of women's subordination. It is not possible to bring in significant change in the condition and position of women by having marginal programmes or separate programmes for them. To bring in gender equality in the society, gender concerns have to be mainstreamed at various levels viz., institution/organization, policies, practices and programmes. Hence in any development programmes there is an urgent need for the mainstreaming processes, which would lead to gender just, and equitable society.

Phase 3. Gender and Water in relation to poverty, class and powerlessness

In this phase of the discussion, participants offered illustrations from their own work of how gender and water is connected to poverty, class and powerlessness. Below, some contributions are excerpted.

NEPAL: In an agriculture economy, water has a close linkage with poverty, particularly in relation to irrigation water.

1. The cost of constructing canals excludes the poor, and limits their coping options in times of distress - forcing them to dispose of better land first. The buyers are usually from high caste groups, which leads the poor to own only marginal and poor quality unirrigated land. The cost of irrigation becomes even more prohibitive as water sources are far away. So is the case with drinking water. As the poor cannot afford land at better locations, provision of drinking water is more difficult for them, and in the process they tend to suffer more from water borne diseases. Since girls and women are responsible for fetching drinking water, they are deprived of educational and income generating opportunities. Easy access to drinking water would release important time needed for the overall development of women. Managing irrigation water usually falls with the male, while that for drinking water with the female.
2. Women's direct involvement in decision making of water management is quite minimal in Nepal while they spend considerable time in water uses particularly for domestic uses. Thus while they spend considerable time in fetching water but they do not take part in deciding where the sources should be developed. Their involvement in decision-making should also be thought of in holistic context. For example, there is a strong linkage between girl education and developing drinking water schemes, and involving them in one and not in another will not lead to desirable results. Another example is the water use for livestock development wherein increasingly greater involvement of women is observed. Micro credit, livestock production and marketing, water management for this purpose are all intertwined and their involvement need to be conceptualized in the context of such backward and forward linkages.

SOUTH AFRICA: A study of gender mainstreaming conducted in rural villages showed:

1. In all villages men were perceived by both men and women as leaders and decision makers. In most cases, women were unwilling to take leadership positions because they believed they lacked ability and training necessary to be leaders.
2. Cultural norms and values played a major role. In some villages women were not allowed to address men in a public forum. Women were not willing to interact with people from outside

the village. Men were expected to interact with outsiders because they were seen to be more educated and capable of handling the challenge.

3. Literacy and education were highly valued by both men and women, but most women could not read or write. Women who were educated were more confident and willing and able to participate in water project committees. However, these women were often treated disrespectfully by men. This led to their withdrawal from participation in decision making.
4. The main barrier to gender mainstreaming was women's low self esteem and lack of confidence in their abilities. This was exacerbated by the attitude of men, which was closely linked to the traditional values and belief that men are inherently superior to women and therefore natural leaders.
5. Women were overburdened by domestic chores and lacked access to resources such as money, time and transport, so they could not attend project meetings and training courses.
6. Another study looked at gender and sanitation in an informal settlement area. It showed that both men and women believed that any work that required voluntary contribution was women's work. However, where there was payment associated with the work, it suddenly became men's work.

SRI LANKA, BANGLADESH, INDIA: In a Sri Lanka study on multiple uses of water in irrigation systems, there was a clear gender dimension in water for commercial uses, since men and women had different enterprises that they had primary responsibility for (and control over). However, the field crops and (to some extent) fishing, which were primarily male responsibilities tended to get recognised more. Many of the women's activities were considered "marginal", or were counted as "domestic", even when they were commercial. A big case in point was homestead gardens. Though often dismissed as "kitchen gardens", in fact these were high-value horticulture. Because they were under women's control, the income from these played a major role in household welfare, as well as women's bargaining power within the households. The same pattern was found in a study of vegetable cultivation in Bangladesh. SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) similarly points to the importance of water for women's enterprises in preparing foods, for example.

CANADA: In very technical water projects within a cultural context of female invisibility in the public sphere, women's needs are ignored. They are seldom represented in water users associations, for example, or may play only a token role in decision-making. Someone during this current discussion reminded us that, since male work is paid, it is therefore deemed more important than reproductive household work. This is as true in rural Canada as it is in any other country I've worked in.

INTERNATIONAL: In working with "water managers", resistance to gender mainstreaming ideas is often greater in those who consider themselves "gender sensitive." Often the resistance is based on unquestioned assumptions about gender roles and expectations, and there is little opening for discussion. In one project, it was very difficult to obtain agreement that:

1. both women and men in the pilot areas should be interviewed
2. The use of female enumerators was essential in order to obtain data from both sexes within a cultural context where women did not speak to male strangers
3. The data from all questions, even those not apparently related to gender, needed to be gender-disaggregated. Even though the "managers" agreed on a policy level to these requests, and appeared to understand the value of gathering gender-disaggregated information, only males conducted the surveys, husbands or brothers generally answered for female farmers, and there were few questions that resulted in gender-disaggregated information. While both women and men play active roles in various stages of the agricultural cycle in this project, these roles will not show up in the baseline data, since only men responded to the questionnaire and may not have had the information, or interest in providing it, that women would have supplied.

THE UNITED STATES: There is a real possibility that female input in this male-dominated engineering field may break down the existing "we always do it like that" attitude, which has stifled and prevented new developments that affected the cost of water and sewage treatment and, therefore, water resources in general. Many centralization projects have been complete failures and had a negative impact on our environment.

1. I worked five years for the State of New York in the Department of Water Resources. All the projects I was involved in dealt with the different priorities of the use of water and I soon found out that the technical aspects are important to accumulate data, but that the massaging of this data was mostly influenced by politics. For example: while the highest (political) priority for building a new dam and reservoir was recreation, it really had a low priority, when compared to other priorities like flood control, water supply and low flow augmentation.
2. Women did not seem to work in this technical field. This changed when I questioned the authorities about using faulty testing procedures and failing to demand the appropriate treatment technologies. Clearly, by shifting from the 'technical' aspects to the 'administrative' aspects of this field of engineering, it also changed the gender of individuals I had to deal with. It is notable that the last and present administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency in the USA is a woman, and so is the Environmental Commissioner of the European Union. There is a question about the technical information they receive to make their decisions - whether they are not relying on the same faulty and misleading information that has and still is impacting water resources programs. Countries developing environmental or water resources programs should not make the same mistakes as were made in the industrial world.

Phase 4 -Recommendations

Participants made many recommendations. Often they overlapped, sometimes they contradicted each other. Most are covered below.

- A key issue is that many managers don't understand gender issues, and don't really know how to mainstream them into their work. The Alliance should provide methodologies, tools and case studies for gender mainstreaming that could be used and adopted by water managers. Deal with the conceptual confusion about what should be addressed and how; upgrade operational knowledge about the linkages of gender equality and women's empowerment to other sustainable development goals; and assess their progress, strengths, and weaknesses in a systematic way.
- What should be aimed for is a situation in which all managers in an institution are required to adopt gender sensitive approaches in their work. This should be one of the performance indicators against which their work is measured. Each line manager should be required to include gender and poverty approaches in their own budgets and workplans.
- Gender mainstreaming in IWRM doesn't mean only working with women but also men. The investments in IWRM at national or regional level should lead to providing equitable benefits and opportunities to both women and men. When we talk about gender, we should be inclusive of both men and women, rather than focusing solely on issues which affect women. The 'men-and-women approach' points to win-win solutions. Poor women need support from men, and poor men need the support of women. However, it must be recognised that social indicators such as wealth and ethnicity generally have gender related inequalities WITHIN them.
- Great effort should be made to present gender in a way that is relevant to water managers within their frameworks. Consider the typical actions that engineers and managers can follow to take account of gender in particular aspects of their work. These issues engage the interest of action-oriented professionals and can form the basis of balanced discussion on possible practical and strategic actions and their benefits. The GWA has used this broad approach from the beginning, emphasising the Effectiveness and Efficiency benefits of gender mainstreaming, as well as Equity. These are concepts which water engineers and managers recognise and face in their daily work - trying to ensure the service works satisfactorily while also minimising the use of resources. This approach forms a feasible basis for mainstreaming gender in the work of water engineers and managers.
- Household gardening must be included in overall irrigation system management. When these 'kitchen gardens' are irrigated by wells, efforts to improve the 'efficiency' of the wells may lead to a depletion of the water table and a drying of these wells. Thus there is need for gender-aware socio-economic investigations and stakeholder participation within a proper technical understanding of system water balance. Without proper investigations of women's use of water, the data used for decision-making about ground-water management is inevitably incorrect.

- Women-centered approaches to water are most likely to be applied at the micro-level i.e. at community, household or small-scale project level. What we need to know is how best to make these micro-initiatives sustainable and how their success can then be scaled up (at all stages of the project cycle and to different locations) for maximum impact.
- Gender equity will never be given as a gift to women from the 'top'. It will require struggles by poor women against vested interests. This requires awareness, confidence and capacity to assert their water demands and negotiate for its realisation. It also means developing their problem solving skills through practical demonstrations. All capacity building/training should be done in the context of facilitating this struggle from the bottom strata. An important element is to make the women aware of their immanent strength as collectives and develop their self esteem/confidence. When these grass root efforts are linked integrally to efforts at higher /policy /intelligentsia/advocacy/campaign level, the process can bear fruit.
- The economic environment and resources that can facilitate confidence-building must be put in place and made accessible to women. Without this level playing field the issue of lack of confidence will continue to plague every genuine efforts at gender mainstreaming.
- Capacity-building/confidence-raising strategies for women, while vital, are not enough to fulfil the need for change in IWRM. Policy that promotes equality gives those on the ground the 'authority' they need to make some changes.
- It is by now common wisdom that you should build on what exists. In most communities, there are female groups that have produced visible achievements, although not in the water sector. It may sometimes be easier to make such groups interested in water than to build confidence in people who would like to have better water supply, but have no achievements to fall back on.
- Some kind of monitoring watchdog or champion is required. In one organisation, there is a Directorate of Transformation whose function is to monitor and report on transformation and equity issues. This has been a powerful stimulus in ensuring improved representation of women in leadership and technical positions. Monitoring is crucial to the success of any mainstreaming project.
- The following are some of the necessary actions to mainstream gender concerns at organisational/institutional levels.
 1. Willingness and capacity of the institutions to have a gender policy
 2. Capacity of the organisation to promote and strengthen women's participation in both technical and social aspects
 3. Gender issues and concerns should be the point for discussions at various meetings or workshops or reviews
 4. Recruit gender experts for water policy development in the organisation, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
 5. Gender analysis need to be done on the needs, priorities, access and control of water resources and also other resources
 6. Gender disaggregated data on water usage by both women and men, the different roles played by them, access and control over resources such as land, forest, common lands, credit, livestock, institutions, pattern of life etc.
 7. The gender issues should be clearly fit into the logical framework and specific indicators should be identified to monitor results.
 8. Careful planning is needed to ensure that the gender focus in not lost.
 9. There should be enough budget and resources allocated for gender related analysis and activities
 10. Commitment to gender equality and all the documents, agreements, reports should speak of this.
 11. Should develop gender related indicators to assess the outcome
 12. Special efforts need to be made to ensure women's participation and inputs at various levels.
 13. Gender sensitisation programmes for the staff at various levels and this should be an ongoing process