

## Summary of the French language conference (in English)

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### I. INTRODUCTION

This 2nd round has run for 8 weeks.

Of the 200 registered participants, 24 took part in the exchanges, for a total of 67 contributions. The great majority of participants (20 out of 24) sent one or two messages, 3 people sent 4 or 5 messages, and 1 sent 15. The discussion group was comprised of 11 women and 13 men, all from the professional sectors related to water, and to gender issues. A few of the participants were participatory approach specialists; others were specialised in the gender approach. These specialists shared freely their experiences throughout these eight weeks.

### II. RETURN TO THE DEBATE ON HUMAN POWERED PUMPS (HPP):

A debate developed on the issue of the HPPs functionality for women and children, who are the main users of these pumps. This debate produced an abundance of responses (18 messages in total!), regarding their technical as well as their socio-cultural aspects. Among the points raised, quite a few referred to the HPPs inconvenience: hardship of water collection, waiting time, cost of water, problem of decency/aesthetics for female users, passing on of water chores from women to children; but also the rumour (denied a number of times) of miscarriages caused by the operation of foot pumps. Problems which can, at times, lead women away from the equipped water supply source and send them back to sources of lesser quality (creeks, traditional wells). To address these problems, a number of solutions have been proposed. Some of these were of a technical nature, as for instance to adopt a motorised water hauling system (which adds issues of costs and maintenance), or to use animals to activate the pumps. Others were pointing out the need to carry out detailed field studies, and to start a true consultation between the pump manufacturers, the government, NGOs, funding agencies, field workers, so that technical choices are made with a full understanding of local realities.

### III. DESCRIBED EXPERIENCES:

- N° 1: Village water management in Côte d'Ivoire
- N° 2: Rural water management in Mali
- N° 3: Village water management in Togo
- N° 4: Water and sanitation in rural area in Benin
- N° 5: Water and sanitation on the urban fringe in Senegal
- N° 6: Sanitation in Koulikoro, Mali
- N° 7: Water and sanitation in Bogota, Colombia

The experiences shared dealt with water and/or sanitation projects, located in rural or urban environment, mainly in West Africa. Most of the projects were aimed at developing infrastructures, with a component related to mobilisation of the populations (men and women), with the intent of organising technical and financial management. Women's involvement was of varying importance and more or less encouraged, depending on priorities defined from the start by the project and the local context. The general conclusion drawn from these experiences is that it is difficult to tally the progresses in the long term, be it in the area of water, sanitation or gender equity. Nonetheless, some positive and encouraging examples were given, showing that women were slowly organising and carving a place for themselves in this sector. On the front of development professionals, it appears that the dominant approach still is the participatory approach, with a varying degree of sensitivity to gender issues. There seems to be still much to be done before gender issues become, systematically, an integral part of water management projects.

### IV. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

After sharing their experiences, the participants submitted their findings and some suggestions. The basic finding is that the weakness, not to say the absence, of women's involvement in water management projects is a recurring problem that must be addressed.

#### 1. GENDER APPROACH

The gender approach, as a self-promotion tool for women and men, must be an integral component of the projects, and not a mere general policy with a few indicators, or a component added as an afterthought once the planning is completed. This strategy must be present in all the project's guidelines. To implement

it, it is not enough to create conditions of participation, even if this step is essential, one must also analyse the causes of women's low involvement. This is why the gender approach requires time, for the required change of mentalities to take place. To suggest outright the objective of "equity" could therefore cause blockages. It is preferable to develop a strategy, and carry out a participatory analysis with the population once the process started. One of these could be, for instance, to develop a gender and water approach within an integrated development context, and build on the participatory diagnostic on the major local problems in women's lives to lay the groundwork of concrete actions on the subject of water.

## 2. PARTICIPATION

### 2.1. General recommendations

Development workers often justify women's non-involvement as a problem of cost. Yet, it turns out that leaving out or neglecting some steps can compromise the success of the project, and in the end incur "remedial" costs that are much higher than the amounts needed to implement a gender and water approach.

- The first contact with the population is of the highest importance. The way in which the community will perceive the action will influence its level of ownership of and participation in the project. In fact, the challenge is to make the populations understand that the project supports their own development, and that they have a real power to act and acquire new skills. All means of communication must ensure that the knowledge of each one is being valued.
- Meetings should be organised in the area of the project and not in public buildings, to avoid the perception that the infrastructures come under the sole responsibility of the State/ project.
- The participation of women and men, financial or in the form of labour, must be required as the matching contribution from the villagers.
- During preliminary studies and needs assessment, the project facilitators must have enough time to gather detailed socio-economic data, broken down by sex.
- Begin work with "homogeneous focal groups" to allow people to express themselves, then alternate with joint group sessions, with the facilitator in attendance or not. This reflection process must respect the pace of the community, to obtain a diagnostic true to the vision of the various groups in the population. Mobilisation and participation are made easier by respecting existing structures, it is however advisable to ensure that these are representative.
- Management committees must be established with great care, it is a step during which the roles of each and everyone must be clearly defined, and during which the advantage of women's involvement must be reaffirmed and spelled out. Once established, see that these committees function in a democratic manner, a crucial aspect for the success of the project, as much from the point of view of water management as from the point of view of gender equity. At the same time, create consensus-building frameworks to "learn to work together".
- Once the project is started, take time, regularly, to assess the situation relating to gender, and, if needed, redirect the action according to the findings.

### 2.2. Specific measures for women

In order to implement the gender and water approach, it is often necessary to develop specific actions for women, and these in three particular areas: awareness-raising, capacity building, and training. Raising the consciousness of all the stakeholders is also essential.

- Choosing facilitation teams comprised of both men and women encourages women to speak freely.
- The first step is to make women aware of the significant role they play in their community.
- A dialogue must be started, but since speaking in public is not a usual practice, spaces specifically for women must be created. These discussion spaces allow women to hone their oral expression skills and to gain some self-confidence. These processes are time-consuming for the facilitators but they are unavoidable, the first changes having to be made in the minds of the women.
- When they already have organisational skills, the mobilisation of women is easier, it is therefore advised to rely on existing groups, meanwhile checking that they are indeed representative.
- Respect women's time schedule.
- Imposing quotas is only effective if they are accompanied by adequate training sessions and a follow-up by the facilitators. This positive discrimination has sometime been used before adopting a gender approach.

### **3. TRAINING/AWARENESS-RAISING**

#### 3.1. For populations

- Analyse carefully the request and frame the training content to respond to the concerns and needs expressed by each of the participants. The sessions must be given in the local language.
- Training must address leadership, the workings of association, but also functional literacy, for the women and the members of the committees.
- It is absolutely crucial to explain the existing relationship between water and health, by calling upon specially trained village facilitators to raise the awareness of the populations (men and women) regarding the maintenance of water supply sources. For the technical aspects of maintenance, it is important to also train women so as not to put them in a situation of dependency toward men in case of breakdown. The management committee's technical team must include at least one trained woman, in order not to limit the role of women to the traditional positions of treasurer, secretary or hygienist.
- Regarding tools, little illustrated manuals must be developed, in the local language, dealing with technical as well as social and organisational aspects of water management. Local radios are a good tool to broadcast information on initiatives related to gender and water; as is the case with video/television, through fictional or documentary programmes, to raise awareness in the populations.

#### 3.2. For development workers

Designed by people sometimes isolated from the realities in the field, the gender approach can represent a challenge to facilitators who are trying to find a way to apply it in a concrete way. This is a result of the fact that training sessions are insufficient for the most part. Facilitators tend to warp the approach and to use poorly the teaching tools related to gender, which they have often never tested in a real situation. Sometimes, the staff does not even have adequate means of communication, or the time to take care of the people. Given these findings, it seems critical not only to train the facilitators in participatory and gender approach techniques, but also to raise the awareness of all stakeholders (funders, NGOs, national technical departments, ...) about this issue. In the area of sanitation, the PHAST method should be adapted to the gender approach, as a complementary training for health education workers.

### **4. DEVELOPMENT: A FACTOR OF EMPOWERMENT FOR WOMEN?**

Participatory methodologies are a positive but insufficient factor for the democratisation of roles, recognition of women and attainment of sustainable changes. One of the central axes of the gender approach is to study the roles of women and men before, during and after any intervention, in order to identify changes in the dividing up and the perceptions of these gender. It is therefore essential to always remain tuned in to detect any change, and even more so in the case of a technical innovation, which rarely benefits women, (technologization/reduction of tasks are often male prerogatives). By developing a good communication during these innovations can lead to the renegotiations of some of the roles.

Evolution is never linear. There are breaks, setbacks, conflicts (in particular within households). In the case of women, infringement on traditions is often claimed, as if going from free water to water for a fee or creating new management structures would not also bring about deep social transformations. It is therefore crucial that the women concerned should be the ones who choose the pace of their evolution, and the cultural aspects they wish to preserve. One thing is certain: in spite of the work overload created by their involvement, women rarely regret their commitment and do not wish to return to their previous position.

### **5. SUSTAINABILITY OF THE ACHIEVED PROGRESS**

The submitted experiences show that at some point, after the teams and funders departure, populations end up, when breakdowns occur, demobilising themselves, disorganising and abandoning the technical as well as financial management of the facilities. Sometimes, there is the will to have drinking water (link between water and health), the problem has more to do with the will/capacity to maintain a collective facility. Volunteer work can also be a factor of demobilisation, in the long term, as well as the lack of transparency or a tendency to authoritarianism in the committees' operating mode. In regards to equity, progress may not last if women are not encouraged to occupy long-term positions of responsibility.

Therefore, one should:

- On the material level, increase the pumps reliability, get to know/develop local networks of replacement parts and efficient repairpersons. Organise the sale of water to

supply a maintenance and replacement fund, while at the same time creating income generating activities and/or reciprocal maintenance systems among villages.

- On the organisational level, follow-up seems a critical element to ensure the sustainability of the results. This follow-up must be carried out on the long term, by the technical as well as support structures, and address the facilities as well as the community's development, and lead, if needed, to a re-energising action.
- On the gender level, it is recommended to put in place at each site a simple follow-up tool to the gender and water approach. Since it is acknowledged that a durable empowerment of women in the area of management increases the chances of the infrastructure's sustainability. It is therefore crucial to work in depth with the women, by dealing with their practical (drinking water) as well as strategic (right to speak, to make decisions, to property...) needs to help change mentalities and practices at the community's pace, and to ensure that these changes last.

## **6. A FEW PROPOSALS TO CONCLUDE...**

Funders and decision-makers must:

- Become aware of the importance of implementing an effective gender and water approach;
- Look into the methods and teaching material that facilitate ownership, management and sustainability of water management infrastructures in an equitable manner;
- Finance and distribute teaching materials so that the water management programmes get to know the gender and water approach.

Finally, it is essential to encourage and develop collaboration between the various stakeholders (populations, funders, governments, NGOs, programme directors, the UN, researchers and practitioners) so that they

can discuss the challenges in implementing the gender approach in activities related to water and sanitation, clarify the concepts (often ill-understood), harmonise programme funding approaches and systems, develop new "gender and water" training programmes, as well as new follow-up and evaluation tools.

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