

Summary of the French language conference (in English)

Introduction:

This 3rd and last round lasted 4 weeks (Sept.16 – Oct.11, 2002).

It brought together some 320 people, of whom 17 (mainly from the South) took part actively to the discussion. Most participants sent 1 message, 6 of them sent 2 messages, for a total of 33 messages.

A comprehensive report summarising the exchanges that were carried out in the 4 languages during the first two rounds was circulated to the discussion group, as a basis for reflection during the 3rd round. The report included the main recommendations put forth earlier by the participants, regarding conceptual as well as methodological issues. These recommendations were sorted under the 7 priorities, on which the participants were invited to give some feedback and make proposals:

Priorities:

1. Work on the definitions of "gender": clarifying and simplifying the term;
2. Promote the "gender and water" concept: with whom, which aspects should be stressed, in what framework?
3. Create an environment which takes into account the issue of gender;
4. Include gender in the planning of water projects;
5. Use a "gender" methodology for projects implementation: what does it involve?
6. Assess impacts in terms of gender;
7. Ensure that policies progress.

Priorities taken up by Participants

Point 1 and 2: Promotion of Gender

The first 2 points were dealt with jointly by the participants:

- To promote the concept of gender is the UTMOST priority, since a poor understanding/application often has the opposite effects than what is expected at the start. This could be due to 3 factors: 1) promotion was carried out by women-centred organisations (and not by organisations concerned with gender issues); 2) the other actors did not perceive in the concept of gender a new dynamic for an harmonised and shared development; 3) the participatory approach was badly understood and applied (and remained too managerial), while even if it had been correctly implemented, it should have included some gender approach components.
- To promote gender encompasses giving to female users the option of playing an active role in water management (participating in decision-making) which they should be entitled to considering their responsibilities in this regard. This reasoning is based on the principle that "people's happiness cannot be made without their participation", and calls therefore for a participatory approach to development.
- To promote gender is to take part in the creation of a gender-friendly environment (point 3).

Recommendations on point 1 and 2:

A large-scale training is essential for a proper dissemination of the gender approach.

- For policy-makers and funders, the training would give them the opportunity to observe and reveal the problems they come across when implementing the gender approach, and they could then adopt the results as a development concept.
- For development practitioners (facilitators) in direct contact with the people: review the communication and training strategy.
- Discuss with the authorities and male policy-makers the benefits of women's participation in water management, and the issues contained in the gender approach.

POINT 3: Creation of Gender-friendly environment

Evolution of mentalities and practices:

- There are two possible types of action to involve women further:

a) Coercive and immediate measures such as quotas, which have a few drawbacks: women are not necessarily ready for this change (lack of training), and this kind of measures do not solve the deeper problem of access to information and to skills, and are therefore much more useful in situations of detected injustices at a level of equal skills.

b) A gradual change effected by thorough work: the challenging of the social and economic order underscored in the gender approach requires the respect of the communities pace. It is not enough to allocate the various roles, but it is also imperative to give the means to the women to fulfil these new responsibilities, which takes time.

– It is essential to promote the rights of women if one wishes to develop an effective water management strategy.

– All the same, mentalities are starting to change ("this type of electronic conference could not have taken place 5 or 6 years ago"), even though this change is not yet framed, systematised, budgeted for, planned, assessed and analysed statistically. But at the same time, initiatives could be blocked if this process is formalised too early. Indeed, taking gender into account remains more than anything a work of lobbying, which the actors must undertake in reaction to situations of inequalities that they come up against.

Education, training, and information:

This is a recurrent problem, which prevents women from taking fully charge of new responsibilities in water management, because of a lack of know-how and self-confidence. Any process of change must start with an education (with political, economic and legal support) and with an awareness on the part of the women of their potential ("gender equity will never be offered as a gift from heaven"). Furthermore, this situation of inequality is often rather attributed to the fact that women are not sufficiently aware of their rights and their roles in the management of their community, than to a real misogyny.

Recomendations on point 3:

1. Develop training courses for women in order to:

- reduce substantially the level of female illiteracy;

- through education, create self-confidence, to help women participate to the public life of their community (speaking out).

2. At the political level: encourage governments to take "bold decisions" (as in Togo, where school fees for girls have been reduced, to fight the imbalance between the level of education of girls and boys); promote the rights of women.

3. Respect the various communities' pacing to change mentalities gradually and thus reduce the risks of blockages.

POINT 4: Include Gender in Planning

Recommendations:

1. The 1st contact with population is very important. Programmes must be presented as a support to self-promotion of their community;

2. Take the time to prioritise problems in small homogenous groups and find equitable solutions. Discuss the contribution that can be made by men, women, youth and older people. This allows to deal with all aspects of the "water" component, and to identify collectively the causes of lack of water, in order to find together realistic solutions (quantity, quality, and sustainability). In this way, the gender approach allows to go beyond the sole issues of pump maintenance and drawing of water;

3. This reflection must be supported by the water supply service, an NGO, an organisational programme mixing poverty alleviation, environmental concerns and sustainable development.

POINT 5: Gender methodology for the implementation of water supply projects

This point is decisive because it challenges the manner in which the data collecting and processing tools are designed, the cause of many difficulties in the implementation of the gender approach: these tools are more often centred on quantitative (number and type of equipment to be installed) rather than qualitative information, and do not take into account the specific needs of each gender. This does not favour the taking into account and the involvement of all the community's components, nor the identification of relevant indicators to measure the outcomes.

Recommendations on POINT 5:

1. For data collection, use the "focus group" technique, it allows the analysis of key messages from the standpoint of a group meeting homogenous criteria (going beyond the sole man/woman dichotomy), by using an open questions maintenance guide, to obtain more qualitative data on water supply and on sanitation. It could be complemented by a household and school framework observation guide.
2. For implementation, 2 participation strategies should be developed: one general the other based on gender. A systemic and participatory approach must be developed.
3. These methodologies must be adapted to each context, preferably with the help of sociologist and anthropologists.
4. Make an explicit difference between gender-based indicators from the very start to be able, later, to measure the impact of actions on women and on men.
5. Monitoring/evaluation must determine quantitatively and qualitatively, through field missions, the level and the nature of participation of both genders, as well as their organisational and problem-solving skills, and their degree of satisfaction.
6. To organise meetings: make sure women are well informed; choose times that are convenient for them; seat them in a good place in the meeting room, respect lapses of time during the debates;
7. Mobilise female staff, both within the technical services and as local intermediaries.
8. Plan training sessions that allow everyone, male and females, to participate.

POINT 6: Evaluation in terms of gender

- Evaluation is critical to any action, in order to measure the progress/setback in relation to set goals.
- It is difficult to assess the impacts of a project in terms of gender, if it has not been developed from the start in that perspective. Unfortunately, it often seems to be the case.
- Evaluation in terms of gender helps to identify concrete results. Disseminating such results can contribute to push forward the taking into account of this issue.
- One of the major difficulties resides not in the implementation of a gender perspective in the field, but in the evaluation of the results, to draw from them scientific analyses or summary documents. It is very difficult to measure the progress achieved, considering that criteria and indicators differ from one person/region to another (i.e. a level of 30% women on a management committee would be considered satisfactory in Africa, but insufficient in Latin America), and that results consequently are not easily comparable.
- The "gigantic" number of parameters to define at the start and to include in the objectives, to be able to measure the impacts upon completion of the project is sometimes discouraging.
- This relativity of the results impinges on the systematisation of a gender methodology.

Recommendations on POINT 6:

1. To assess the impacts in terms of gender, facilitators must pay special attention to discussion with populations, rather than develop reports focussing on justifying methods conceived at the office. It is up to the policy-makers/ programmers/budget people to know how to untangle and put into a system the data collected.
2. Make women participate in the data analysis, in the outcome review as well as in the formulation of recommendations and follow-up actions, to make them more relevant and efficient.
3. Include in the indicator grids the objectives of sustainability, rational use of the resource, and duplication. A different importance will be attached to these indicators depending on the communities and also depending on whether one is dealing with women or with men.

POINT 7: Evolution of policies

Governments and policies still remain very theoretical in their commitment on the issue of "gender and water", unlike numerous efforts already supplied by UN agencies and NGOs. Nevertheless, gender is now acknowledged (in political declarations, strategic documents and decentralisation policies), as a poverty alleviation strategy, it is therefore less a case for discussion and more a case for action.

Recommendations on POINT 7:

1. It is important to know at which levels decisions are taken, and policies developed, particularly in a decentralisation context, currently existing in many African countries.
2. Some political decisions, and associated legislation, even if they deal with clearly defined issues (i. e.: authorisation for women to leave the area without their husband's permission) can have wider positive impacts, if only for the reflection and awareness that they can bring about. Thus, the issue of "gender and water" can benefit from the progress achieved in other areas (parity in politics, access to credit, campaign against spousal violence...).

3. The continuation of some chores in the name of tradition can be perceived as a form of violence, against which the political must take a stand. Political decisions are an unavoidable prerequisite to the evolution of the situation between men and women, and as such, countries should develop, as they do for other sectors, national strategies on the gender issue.
4. To develop evaluations that measure the actions' impact in terms of gender and submit the concrete results to decision-making bodies can also have an influence on policies.
5. The change dynamic that has started must be speeded up through a more concrete involvement of the policies.
6. One must remain vigilant when it comes to the development of new policies related to the recognition of gender, since the concept is still fairly new and not always well understood and used. This leads to the question of knowing how it would be possible to monitor the manner in which the concept is used.

Other findings and proposals

Gender as an overall concept:

The concept of gender must include all the disadvantaged groups: youth, the disabled, the homeless, the unemployed and other marginalised people. Indeed, gender is not limited to a simple dichotomy men-women, taking into account that these two groups are not homogenous, and that they both include inequalities (socio-economical, ethnic...). Nevertheless, the inequality between men and women remains fundamental, and gender-based analysis is always relevant, everywhere in the world.

"Gender" or "Feminisation":

This question is raised insofar as working in terms of gender results sometimes in actions aimed mainly at women, since it is often a case of feminising some activities or sectors.

This however presents some risks:

- 1) To talk of feminisation can lead to an increase of the workload of women in the projects, and avoids the central question of division (of work, of power, of resources...) between the genders. Besides, it is essential to discuss with men the issue of their responsibilities, and of the common interest of a larger involvement of women.
- 2) Men's responsibilities and behaviours when it comes to health issues (funding, raising of children, occupational health, reduction of risks for health and the environment...) must also be discussed with men, which is rarely done in the case of current water programmes.

Resource economy:

Some awareness-raising actions must be developed on the issue of waste of water, aimed both at men and women, since this issue is an integral part of the process of rational and equitable management of water resources.

"Whoing Campaign":

Christine Van Wijk put forward an international movement proposal, that would ask the question "Who?" at all times and in all places (conferences, feedback on political and project documents). This would mark the end of the common practice of identifying individuals solely based on their belonging to one or the other sex, a practice that allows avoiding the issue of inequalities between men and women in the world.