

Summary of the Spanish language conference (in English)

INTRODUCTION

The Conference brought together 325 participants from Central America, South America, Spain and the Spanish-speaking islands of the Caribbean. The beginning was characterized by a low level of participation. However, it was followed by a lively exchange of ideas. There were 65 messages circulating and many of those who did not actively participate mentioned the heavy workload they faced as the reason for not making more contributions. As was the case with the first conference, the interventions of some men were a source of controversy.

2. IMPORTANT ISSUES FOR ACTION

The participants' interventions revolved around five areas of concentration and their opinions are grouped together as follows:

2.1 THE CONCEPT OF GENDER AND ITS TRANSVERSALIZATION

The conference continued the discussion on the concept of gender and its transversalization, stressing that gender implies equality between men and women and not simply the inclusion of women, since projects often end up increasing women's workload without producing any changes with respect to their position. We were reminded that this concept has, as a prerequisite of its application, the complete defence of human rights, and that equality is evaluated on the basis of individual ability, irrespective of gender. One participant suggested constructing a concept of gender for the region.

It is considered necessary to deepen the understanding of the concept of transversalization of the gender perspective, in order to go beyond suggesting the incorporation of gender in all phases of a project, and assume the challenge of working for the empowerment of women and the reconstruction of the masculine identity.

Consistent with previous conferences, participants emphasized the need for women themselves to strengthen their self-esteem, self-confidence and self-recognition of the value they imprint on what they do and their achievements in the management of water resources. Women should take ownership of their rights and exercise them in order to produce real cultural changes.

One participant mentioned that addressing the issue of gender from a "human perspective" has given good results in his organization. This point of view sparked interest, but the conference had come to a close when the topic was introduced. Therefore, we were not able to discuss it in depth.

2.2 PUBLIC POLICY

The State's commitment to promoting gender equality and to end the invisibility of women needs to be improved. A gender analysis should be included in the process of designing and implementing public policies oriented towards the reclamation, conservation and access to water, in such a way that they reclaim the achievements of pilot projects and respond equally to the needs of men and women. The issue of public policy needs further analysis as it has been treated hastily in the conferences. The areas in which work should be done are related to:

- Management of economic resources for policy development
- Work methodologies
- Procedures (rules, regulations, etc.)
- Incorporation of the social actors' perspective
- Existence and functioning of participative mechanisms for decision making

- Creation of spaces, decision making bodies, responsibilities and accurate mechanisms to move forward in the construction of gender equality
- Democratization of information
- Political will for its realization

2.3 THE INSTITUTIONS

There is agreement among participants about the importance of including a gender perspective in institutions. However, the manner in which the state of progress is seen regarding this point differs in the following ways:

Some participants claim it is important to educate and sensitize boards of directors so they apply, with conviction, a gender perspective in a transversal fashion, change rules unfavourable to women and establish strategies to encourage mastery of the gender perspective and its application among operative personnel (engineers and professionals in the social sciences areas) and support staff. One participant mentioned that it is not always easy to convince colleagues to apply a gender perspective because they consider it an additional responsibility.

Another participant stated that enough sensitized personnel exists with respect to gender, due to personal conviction or because people follow the guidelines of financial agencies. Although the work that has been done until now by the majority of water and sanitation institutions has been fundamentally geared towards promoting the participation of women, in practice very little has been done to achieve equality between men and women. To overcome this situation, she proposes changing the language in such a way that it becomes explicit that the work being done is for the "equality of relations between men and women in the area of water and sanitation."

Another participant underscored that a political decision to incorporate the gender perspective in water and sanitation institutions is not enough; rather, it is important to keep in mind the theoretical framework, the tools for analysis and application and the will of the actors. Moreover, personnel of the same institution should monitor adherence to these policies.

For others, the lack of recognition of the existence of gender specialists is of concern. They emphasize that it is important to seek out their support when it is necessary, since the presence of a professional specialized in gender can help visibilize the cultural rules that legitimize inequality and show how situations taken as natural or normal are not. Furthermore, it could be useful to designate male workers to promote gender mainstreaming.

Regarding how the work in these institutions should be carried out, CARE El Salvador informed us about the four fundamental steps they have developed:

- Diagnosis of the institutional situation
- Analysis of the gaps between men and women
- Identification of strategies to reduce those gaps
- Commitment to implement a work plan to resolve problems encountered (suggest alternative solutions, who does what, how, with what resources)

It was precisely the adherence to the plan that allowed closing the salary gap between men and women who hold the same positions.

It is important to highlight that Bolivia reported that a large number of basic sanitation and health institutions, as is also the case with financial agencies, work with a gender perspective and use participative educational methodologies.

2.4 SUGGESTIONS STEMMING FROM PRACTICE TO EXECUTE PROJECTS

Some participants mentioned strategies that have been used in their institutions to implement the gender perspective. They are summarized in the following:

- Separate data by men and women.
- Schedule meetings at times convenient for women.
- Ensure the participation of women in key decisions about the water system.
- Promote that half of the Water Committee members be women and hold key positions.
- Technical training for both men and women.
- Promote mixed spaces for men to visibilize the participation of women and acknowledge them as producers and users of irrigation water, so that they can improve their participation in organizations of irrigation users.
- Carry out workshops on gender aimed at men to facilitate their sensitization and allow greater openness towards the participation of women.
- quality indicators to measure the impact of intervention in terms of gender.
- Clarify that at the community level equal participation is beneficial.
- On the other hand, Development Services, SER from Guatemala, reported that in their water supply projects they have managed to change the rules so that women
- Can represent their husbands in general meetings and have the right to speak and vote.
- Automatically acquire the property titles of streams in case of marital problems, since men are usually the beneficiaries of this right.
- Can be partners in the project with the same powers their husbands enjoyed, should they become widows.

2.5 INDICATORS

The importance of defining gender indicators for each project was highlighted. The PROSAGUAS program of CARE El Salvador has taught its participants that gender mainstreaming may remain only as a declaration of good intentions if indicators are not established at the planning stage to measure intermediate results and the impact of the programs. A follow-up of these indicators must be conducted and used in the evaluation. The use of indicators has allowed the PROSAGUAS program to detect situations where female leadership has decreased by 10% at the end of the project, compared to female leadership at its initiation.

It was reported that an integrated gender indicator system for the areas of Work and Education has been developed by the Brazilian Institute of Municipal Management (Instituto Brasileiro de Administração Municipal) and UNIFEM. Through the utilization of socio-demographic indicators, the system demonstrates the successes and obstacles of achieving the equality of men and women in MERCOSUR member countries. On the other hand, a study on Gender Statistics undertaken by CEPAL (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/United Nations) shows the inequalities between men and women in basic aspects of the social and economic structure in the countries of the region.

3. CHALLENGES

The following are some of the challenges mentioned by the participants:

- To generate an individual commitment in order to incorporate the gender perspective in all projects and institutions.
- To get partner institutions to recognize the importance of the gender perspective, considering that some institutions are no longer working directly with the communities, but through local members.
- To include community participation with a gender perspective in non-conventional water supply systems.
- To study the concept of integrated management of the hydraulic resource, taking into account that mayor difficulties in implementing this concept occur at the institutional level before they occur in the communities. Sewage and water waste must also be included in a more explicit manner in the concept of integrated management of the hydraulic resource.
- To work on inter-sectorial proposals.
- To generate institutional political will to promote gender mainstreaming, especially among men.
- To take into consideration gender and economic and political inequality in accessing and managing natural and environmental resources.
- To involve men in gender work since these activities have generally been handled by women and have been focused mainly on women's groups and on areas such as health and education.
- To involve young people in projects as agents of change.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GENDER AND WATER ALLIANCE

- To undertake a regional inventory of the strengths and weaknesses related to gender and organize regional meetings or any other type of activity to lobby decision makers to promote gender mainstreaming.
- To promote the creation of focus groups in Latin-American countries that take into consideration cultural differences to design advising guidelines; to implement follow-ups of the technical and political discussions on gender mainstreaming; to do research studies that analyze how gender relations are played in different cultural zones of the same country and to organize events (by country, location or institution) that interest audiences in the issue of gender and water.
- To support the implementation of courses on gender in the region.
- To disseminate information about current policies (national or sectorial) in different countries and the strategies they follow to get them implemented. To define, from the analysis of the inventory of strengths and weaknesses, guidelines to facilitate each country initiating its process of dissemination of information, since it is necessary to review national laws on water and the environment from a gender perspective.
- To organize, in a systematic way, positive and negative experiences in order to propagate them through a document and to study the results of the electronic conferences to advance further.
- To support institutional cultural change in donor institutions and projects. Institutional culture is patriarchal; therefore, it reflects an organizational structure that reproduces the inequalities of the way of thinking about the projects and the management of their technical resources.
- To network in order to facilitate information sharing, propagation of activities, formation of regional alliances and the articulation of policies among governmental areas, women and NGOs.
- To promote gender mainstreaming in education, especially in technical careers.
- To sponsor and reward organizational models of project management that are in agreement with the transformation of gender and age relations.
- To support reviewing, from a gender perspective, internal regulations and teaching materials used in all projects.
- To undertake projects to train the staff of the organizations in order to include a gender perspective in all projects.
- To sponsor the formulation and use of gender indicators in all projects.
- Finally, suggestions to improve the position of women were made:
- To promote women's access to land ownership, which improves their position as users of irrigation
- To support expanding the access of girls to education in rural areas and the creation of educational programs for women