

Zimbabwe:

Gender mainstreaming in water supply and sanitation in Manzvire Village, Chipinge District

Challenges

Water supply systems installed soon after Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 were often based on a supply-driven approach and not sustainable. Women lost much of their productive time travelling long distances to fetch water for their families. This also adversely affected girls' school enrolment – a trend further exacerbated by high dropout rates at puberty due to the lack of sanitary facilities at most schools.

In recognition of the imbalances which existed in the water sector and the question of sustainability of facilities, Zimbabwe embarked on a water sector reform in 1993. Women's participation in project activities was encouraged in line with global trends given the critical links between gender, water and sanitation. Four years later, the Chipinge district adopted a Community-based Management approach to water resource management and introduced it into some of its wards, including the village of Manzvire.

Manzvire village has a population of just over 5,500, with 514 households. About 290 households have access to individual 'Blair' toilets (Ventilated Improved Pit latrines) and 180 have access to pit latrines. At least 45 households were said to have no access to any form of decent sanitation but were allowed temporary access to their neighbours' facilities. There is no surface water in this village, with the closest source the Save River, approximately 15 kilometres away. People use boreholes and shallow wells as water supply sources. The village has 10 bore-holes with at least eight reported to be functional. HIV/AIDS and rural/urban migration contribute to at least 80 per cent of the households being female or orphan-headed.

Programme/Projects

In 2003, the United Nations Children's fund (UNICEF) contributed approximately US\$ 4,000 to the Chipinge Rural District Council (RDC) for rehabilitation of water supply systems, mainly bore-holes. Given high external contracting costs, the RDC adopted a community-based approach and targeted funds for community mobilization and training workshops for local well sinkers and latrine builders.

Planning and selecting appropriate technology and sites for new water points, as well as upgrading and rehabilitating existing systems, are jobs that are increasingly based on both men's and women's participation. In Manzvire, the women selected the technology to be used as well as the site locations. An elder remarked, "It is the women who spend much of the time with this resource and we saw it fit for them to have a bigger share when it comes to decisions."

The women also established savings and credit with revolving funds to purchase the locally available spare parts and greasing materials. In Manzvire, women established a cooperative garden. Their male counterparts and husbands were asked to make contributions to the fund when required. The women opened a Post Office Savings Bank account to deposit these community funds.

Outcomes

- Women are actively involved in decision-making and now feel strongly that they are equally effective agents of change with men;

- Since the women's maintenance work is done on a voluntary basis, the work costs significantly less;
- The financial resources provided by UNICEF were targeted to rehabilitate 15 boreholes, but with active women's participation in operation and maintenance, 60 boreholes were rehabilitated;
- Women have more time for productive activities such as market gardening, which apart from giving them some cash, improves their nutritional base;
- Women are using interest charged from the savings and credit clubs to maintain boreholes;
- Girls stay at school longer since they do not have to spend so much time collecting water;
- Better hygiene behaviour is practiced, including use of rubbish pits in local households;
- The health of the village has improved, including a significant decrease in diarrhoeal disease; and
- The village of Manzvire will act as a role model for other communities in UNICEF's documentary.

Key Factors for Success

Health educators:

- The Ministry of Health was instrumental in training Village Health Workers, who took up the daunting task of educating and information dissemination to the general public on health and hygiene good practices.
- As a result, in Manzvire, health clubs and other community-led initiatives have been initiated.

Role of elected and traditional leaders:

- Much of the project's success can be attributed to the effective leadership of their dedicated councillor, Mrs. Chirimambowa, and to traditional leaders who were called upon to resolve disputes.

Main Obstacles

Males felt their roles were threatened:

- Initially, in the male-headed households, the husbands felt threatened and disapproved their wives' involvement in project meetings. A UNICEF workshop raised awareness of the benefits of training both men and women, which helped the men accept that their wives were equally important agents of change. The men demonstrated their acceptance by assisting with other household tasks while their wives were attending related community meetings and training.

Traditional dress:

- The long traditional dress worn by Zimbabwean women inhibited work for the latrine builders, and initially overalls and work-suits were considered inappropriate.
- Women can now freely wear work-suits and overalls during latrine construction and repairing of bore-holes.

Looking Ahead - Sustainability and Transferability

For future projects, it is important to remember that:

- Gender mainstreaming in itself is not a panacea for solving water and sanitation problems;

- Poverty carries with it limited access to safe water and sanitation and poverty needs to be addressed if true empowerment is to be achieved;
- Labour involved in community-based management must be divided equitably between men and women so that the women do not wind up with even heavier workloads that offset the benefits of the improved water and sanitation facilities; and
- There is a need to invest heavily in capacity building at village, district and national levels. There is also need for institutional set-up to spearhead and assist with the research, documentation and distribution of findings on gender mainstreaming for implementation.

Further Information

- Contact the researcher:
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- To read about the country and UNICEF's involvement in Zimbabwe:
<http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/zimbabwe.html>

Source

Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women, Gender, water and sanitation; case studies on best practices. New York, United Nations (in press).