

Ghana: Gender Integration in a Rural Water Project in the Samari-Nkwanta Community

Challenges

In Ghana, traditionally, women and children are the primary collectors, users, and managers of household water. When water systems break down women and children are the most affected, since they then have to travel far to search for water for household use. Women are the key players in implementing changes in hygiene behaviour; however, despite the knowledge and experience that they bring to water resource management, the contribution and roles of rural women are often overlooked or under-utilized in the drafting of water and sanitation policies.

The community in which this project took place is Samari-Nkwanta, with about 650 inhabitants and situated about 373 km from Ghana's capital, Accra. It is located in the Ejura-Sekyedumasi District, which represents about 7 per cent of the Ashanti Region, and is home to a World Vision Ghana (WVG) Area Development Programme. The community is in a rural area where farming is the main source of livelihood and engages 60 per cent of the economically active population. Before the water project, women in this area worked a daily average of 19 hours, while men worked around 12 hours a day. During the dry season when the community's regular water sources dried up, women and girls had to walk about three to four miles over dangerous terrain to bring water and firewood to their families, sometimes more than once a day. Their primary water source area was described as "Aberewa nnko", meaning old women cannot get there. Many girls also had to abandon their schooling to search for water.

Programme/Projects

The community's water and sanitation programmes came about in response to the need for interventions to address a serious infestation of guinea worm, which had existed among the community members for several decades. In Ghana, guinea worm is prevalent mostly in remote areas where there are few wells and where people draw their drinking water from ponds and water holes. It is extremely painful and can cause permanent disability. This problem combined with poor access to potable drinking water in the region led to the birth of the Samari-Nkwanta Water and Sanitation Project (SWSP) in 1992.

In response to a severe drought in Ghana in 1982-1983, WVG commissioned the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (renamed the Ghana Water Company in 1993) and the Ghana Water Resource and Research Institute to conduct a survey on water supply in communities where WVG operated. The 1984 survey reported the lack of potable water as a great constraint to WVG's rural development programmes. In response, the organization developed the Ghana Rural Water Project (GRWP). Since then this project has shifted from a strictly technology-driven, "get it done" approach to a community-based, people-oriented, demand-driven focus, which includes an acknowledgement that there is a significant correlation between gender issues, poverty alleviation and the well-being of children.

Through the GRWP initiative, WVG supplied the Samari-Nkwanta village with two boreholes fitted with hand pumps, two public Ventilated Improved Pit latrines (VIP)

and a urinal. The community has since identified this water and sanitation project as having had a high level of community participation and gender integration and that it has brought them considerable relief in many areas of their lives.

Outcomes

Positive outcomes of the project include:

- Promotion of gender equality: a shift from male-dominance to a more equitable sharing of power and decision-making, particularly within the WATSAN committee;
- Gender roles: women have on average five more hours per day to use more productively on their farms, in their households and for other activities;
- Education: girls now make up 53 per cent of primary school students, compared to 43 per cent in 1995;
- Access to water: farming practices have improved due to reliable access to water; and
- Health and hygiene: guinea worm has been eradicated among the entire water user group.

Overall, the project has allowed for increased education for more community members, healthier individuals, and a deeper respect for women. The women also now have more time to spend with their families. One man in the village noted, “My marriage has improved and become more cordial. We have time for other economic development projects”.

Key Factors for Success

The main factors that contributed to the success of this project were:

- Gender sensitizing and mass awareness training and promotion used at the start of the project;
- Ensuring that both men and women were equally represented on the WATSAN committee and received relevant training to support their participation;
- Ensuring that both female and male water users were responsible for the water system’s maintenance and operation; and
- Fostering sensitivity to both women’s and men’s concerns in the community.

Additionally, the use of these gender mainstreaming and participatory approaches contributed significantly to:

- An increase in the recognition and visibility of women’s roles, equal to that of men, in the WATSAN Committee, the PMVs and latrine construction artisans and in the community in general; and
- A real sense of ownership of their water and sanitation resources by both the male and female members of the Samari community.

Main Obstacles

Regarding traditional gender roles, the male dominance prevalent in some Moslem communities in Ghana was especially apparent in Samari-Nkwanta. The women assumed that they should not seek new roles as water facility managers and discouraged other women from engaging in what was perceived as a male role. However, WVG’s decision to consciously involve both women and men in drilling

led community members to re-evaluate their existing gender roles. This was reinforced by the WVG ensuring that women and men were represented equally on the WATSAN committee. The women were given equal access to training in water systems operations and maintenance and environmental sanitation methods.

Looking Ahead - Sustainability and Transferability

The community was able to achieve these results as well as more equitable access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities primarily because the project was facilitated within an atmosphere of cooperation and coordination between men and women, as well as between the Ghanaian government and World Vision Ghana.

Further Information

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- For basic information about Ghana as well as World Vision involvement in Ghana, see: http://www.wvi.org/wvi/country_profile/ghana.htm
<http://wedc.lboro.ac.uk/publications/pdfs/24/akama.pdf>

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).