

## **Kenya**

### **Gender Differences in Community Water Management Machakos**

Physical attack from thugs is only one of the problems experienced by women drawing water from the Yatta irrigation scheme in Machakos District, Kenya. Due to droughts, there is competition for water in Machakos. Most people don't get enough to irrigate their crops. The government has set up a community management system, involving user groups and water management committees. However 85% of respondents of an IDRC survey said women and children trying to draw water are the victims of harassment by men and attacks by thugs.

The survey reflected many general patterns found by researchers who collect gender-stratified data on water access in the developing world:

- While over 75% of the households were officially headed by men, a gendered data analysis showed that, in nearly 35% of cases, women were the actual economic heads, responsible for the support of between 5-10 people. A quarter of the households comprised over 11 members!
- In 76% of the households, the owners of the land were the males. Men made the major investment decisions such as purchases of land and cattle. Women were only allowed to make decisions on domestic water and general household investments including minor irrigation work.
- 96% of households irrigated their crops three or four times a week. 44% of the labour was provided by women, and only 29% by men. The other 12% was provided by children.
- Most (92%) of the households irrigated their fields at night. This exposed the women to the danger of attack by thugs, to difficulties in getting child-care while involved in irrigation activities, and to health dangers caused by the cold night air.
- Male farmers who irrigated illegally diverted the canal's water to their farms. They didn't do this if other male farmers were also irrigating, for fear of starting a fight. They only did it when the women were using the water. The women called this harassment directed at them, saying it severely disadvantaged them in their farming pursuits.
- 85% of the respondents belonged to a water access group, but few women sat on water management committees, since they were afraid of expressing themselves in front of men and were too busy with household chores to attend meetings.
- Women are the ones who did the washing and herding of livestock. However, they were not consulted during the design of the water supply system, so no provision was made for making facilities available for these activities - for example troughs for watering animals and facilities for washing and bathing.

- Respondents in the survey said those who got the most water during shortages were: those closest to the main furrow or canal (24%); the most aggressive individuals and lawbreakers (24%); the wealthy and influential (15%); men (15%).
- 99% of those who policed the water supply were men and the majority of respondents said these officials were corrupt and unfair.

The consultant hired to carry out the survey recommended that:

- Meeting times should be changed to accommodate to women's schedules.
- Women should be encouraged to attend meetings and vie for leadership positions in the management groups.
- The community itself should be given greater responsibility for the entire management of the system to prevent corruption by those with greater wealth.

**This case illustrates:**

The difference made by sex-disaggregated data;

The disadvantages women face due to traditional male-female power relations; and that

The lack of a gender approach leads to structural impoverishment of women.

Source: IDRC, Management of Water demand in Africa and the Middle East