GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN WATER MANAGEMENT:
A CHALLENGE TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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INTRODUCTION

The quest for development has led to consensus that participation by both men and women, not as objects of development but as equal partners, is essential for sustained interventions. This has encouraged the promotion and use of gender sensitive approaches in water and sanitation programs and, more recently, in integrated water resources management (IWRM).

Water resources management has an urgent need of gender specific analysis due to the rapidity by which notions of integrated water resources management and development have been swept onto international policy-making agenda (UNICEF/WHO 2000; 2nd World Water Forum, 2000; The Bonn Conference 2001; MDGs, 2001 and WSSD, 2002).

Sustainable water management requires the integration of gender dimensions at all levels and for all water activities, from policies to projects. Yet, too often, under-represented users, particularly women - the main users and managers of water - are excluded from decision-making and planning.

This exclusion of women has made water management systems less responsive to demands of water services. Moreover, it has squandered the skills and energy of half the world’s population that could be used in developing countries to provide water services and manage natural resources thus contributing to sustainable social, economic, environmental and personal development.

Such a situation is dominant in most of the Mediterranean countries and in the developing ones, in particular. However, nowadays, wave of changes is felt in many developing countries. Technically and politically, the important role women could play in attaining successful and sustainable water use and management is well recognized.

In spite of the variation in approaches, decision-makers are now showing similar thinking on how to manage the available water resources efficiently, being fundamentally based on a participatory approach where both men and women should be involved and have an equal voice in managing the sustainable use of water resources and sharing benefits.

In many countries around the world, including the Mediterranean ones, a lot of efforts have been invested in developing gender mainstreaming material. A major challenge program officers and water and gender specialists are facing is that such information and materials are anchored in different institutions, resource centres, web sites and organizations. Where to find such specific information at the national level and how to build a dedicated web site and an effective network gathering such information in an attractive way to guide and assist the users in mainstreaming gender dimensions in the different sectors and those related to water in particular, is the real challenge.

This is one of the main objectives of the EU GEWAMED Project coordinated by Bari Institute and realized in collaboration with 18 Institutions covering the majority of the Mediterranean countries.

INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT (IWRM) AND ITS MAJOR TARGETS

The IWRM is a cross-sectoral policy approach to respond to the growing demands for water in the context of finite supplies.
Global Water Partnership (GWP, 2000) defines IWRM as a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of the vital ecosystems.

IWRM aims to strike a balance between the use of the resources for livelihoods and conservation of resources to sustain their functions for future generations.

**IWRM KEY-POINTS**

Effective water governance is crucial for the implementation of IWRM plans. Awareness of this has been raised through a series of dialogues on effective water governance. Approaches and lessons learned from this dialogue were presented in the 3rd World Water Forum of Kyoto, 2003. The findings gave emphasis to the following IWRM key-points:

- water should be treated as an economic, social and environmental good;
- water policies should focus on the management of water and not just on the provision of water;
- governments should facilitate and enable the sustainable development of water resources, including a regulatory framework;
- water resources should be managed at the lowest appropriate level and,
- there should be recognition that women play a central role in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.

**WATER AND GENDER PRESENT SITUATION**

At present, we can notify that, globally, there is a better understanding and more awareness of the gender issues involved in water management and a range of initiatives have been introduced to improve the situation. Many countries recognized the benefits of involving women in all aspects of water use and thus most government guidelines, project designs, programmes and policies now address gender concerns. However, too many projects and programmes focus on the practical rather than the strategic needs of women. Focusing should be given to the water rights; those would provide women with permanent means of production – the basis to greater wealth creation, long-term prosperity and financial security. But such a change challenges longstanding traditions and practices (Hamdy, 2005).

Indeed, although men and women both have water-related responsibilities, gender based divisions of labour determine who controls the many uses of water. Moreover, water management structures – from the local level to the basin level - tend to be dominated by large water users and by administrative political and economic elites. As a result, poor families’ water needs are often ignored, undermining the welfare and livelihoods. A crucial point is that in some societies men have deeply ingrained insecurities about the notion of women owing property, including land and water right for farming.

The issue is not just empowering women, but, it also involves addressing and altering men's deeply ingrained incentives about women owning property. Such changes are possible only with fundamental shifts in gender relations.

**Why Introducing Gender Mainstreaming**

In most developing countries, including those of the Mediterranean and Middle East regions, poor targeting, inequitable distribution of benefits and burdens, and poor operation and maintenance structures have hindered development projects aimed at addressing issues of sustainable development in water resources management. Community participation and management approaches have failed to address these issues largely because communities are often seen as a collection of equal people with common purpose. In reality, this is not the case as the community is usually made of individuals and groups who command different levels of power, wealth, influence and ability to express the needs, concerns and rights.

Where resources are scarce, as it is the case for water, there is competition for supplies and those at the lowest end of the power spectrum – often the poor and women in particular - will go without. In
this regard, applying a gender analysis helps development agencies to better target their resources and to ensure that gender perspectives are taken into account following a gender policy.

Water scarcity and its fragility pose different challenges for rural men and women because of their different roles, relations and responsibilities, opportunities and constraints and uneven access and control of resources.

Furthermore, agricultural, environmental and related water policies and programmes often fail to recognize women’s particular needs and crucial contribution in the use and the management of water resources.

In this regard, in the arid and semi-arid countries, and particularly those of the Mediterranean, still more work needs to be done to incorporate a gender perspective in policy, projects and programmes concerning the water sector. This can be promoted through a better understanding of men’s and women’s roles, and their perspective concerns and needs.

Governments, development agencies and civil society organizations are increasingly incorporating a gender perspective in their policies, programmes and projects aimed at sustainable use and management of natural resources. However, the road to achieve this goal is still a long and arduous one, and the commitments made at international conferences and conventions need to be translated into practice, with the full and equal participation of women and men of the local, national and international levels.

Yet, despite these efforts, gender discrimination in access to and control of resources and services persists - as does the neglect of women’s rights - because of political and cultural impediments that are difficult to eradicate and that require resources and strong political will. These impediments have also hindered the signatory parties’ and development agent’s efforts to mainstream gender in sustainable land and water resources development and management.

Gender Mainstreaming in the Water Sector: Gaps and Weaknesses

For most countries of the Mediterranean, gender mainstreaming is not well defined. There is an apparent need for a set of core requirements that represent the reasonable minimum for gender mainstreaming. An effective gender mainstreaming requires:

- clear objectives and targets on gender equality;
- gender analysis;
- monitoring and reporting;
- resources and capacity, tools and dialogue of gender equality (qualified personnel, institutions and government, civil society, internal team work, donor community) and its implementation.

These requirements are needed to ensure, on one hand, that progress is made beyond a pro-forma or simplistic application of the mainstreaming gender strategy, and on the other hand, that the energy and commitment of staff and partners working on gender issues are used to the full.

One of the main Gaps hindering gender mainstreaming is highly related to gender policies and strategies. Such policies are not based on realistic analysis of the Organization/Ministries including their decision-making structures and planning routines and its history with respect to gender-related initiatives.

For gender policies to be effective, they should fit with the organizational culture, structures and procedures and should have the following three distinct components:

- **situation analysis** - examining gender issues concerning beneficiary groups and concerning the organization itself. The latter includes an examination of staff knowledge, skill, commitment and practice in relation to gender issues;
- **the policy itself** - this should be fundamentally devised on the basis of the situation analysis;
- **action plan** - this sets out in detail how the policy will be implemented over a special time period, including activities, budgets, responsibility and indicators for monitoring and evaluation.
Major Reasons for Using a Gender Perspective in IWRMP

The experiences gained and learned lessons in the developed and developing countries indicate that effective, efficient and equitable management of water resources is only achieved when both, women and men, are involved in consultation process and in management and implementation of water related services. Striking a gender balance ensures that:

- the roles and responsibilities of women and men are mobilized to best effect the creativity, energy and knowledge of both genders to contribute to making water schemes and eco-systems work better;
- the benefits and costs of water use accrue equitably to all groups.

A gender perspective in IWRM is necessary for a variety of reasons:

- **Increasing project effectiveness and meeting project results**: experience now demonstrates that ensuring both women’s and men’s participation improves project performance and the likelihood of sustainability and enhances project results. In other words, a project is more likely to achieve what planners hope it will achieve if women and men, both rich and poor, are active participants and decision-makers (Naryan, 1995; Fong *et al.*, 1996 and Quisuimbing, 1994).

- **Support environmental sustainability**: through the greater participation of both women and men, sustainability projects can have an increased profile. There is widespread interest in and commitment to a “new development paradigm” that integrates environmental sustainability with gender equality and justice within and between generations (Diamond *et al.*, 1997).

- **The need for accurate analysis of natural resources use**: it is worthy to stress here that social and economic analysis is incomplete without an understanding of gender differences and inequalities.

  With gender analysis, planners gain a more accurate picture of communities, natural resources uses, households and water users. We are in need of understanding the differences among and between women and men (Who does what work? Who does make which decisions? Who does use water for what purpose? Who does control the resources? Who is responsible for different family obligations? etc.). Having accurate data for the above raised questions is needed for a good analysis and to more effective initiatives. However, in this regard, many issues still need to be explored:
  - women and men tend to have different uses, priorities and responsibilities for water resources. There are also trends along gender lines in terms of access to and control over water and water rights. If planners do not have an accurate picture of such themes, the analysis accuracy is in doubt.
  - gender differences and inequalities mean that women and men experience changes in water availability, services or water policies differently. Thus, an initiative should be studied for its differential impact on women and men to ensure that all implications are clearly understood and there are no unintended negative repercussions.
  - the differences and inequalities between women and men influence how individuals respond to changes in water resources management. Understanding gender roles, relations and inequalities can help explain the choices people make and their different options.
  - gender relations and inequalities influence collective responses to water resources management issues. Women and men tend to organize in different ways. Women often face specific obstacles to participating in a project, joining a water-users committee or providing input into a consultation session.
  - Poor women generally have less access to water supplies and greater constraints on time and labour resources than other women or men. They are likely to be in poorer health and their children are at greater risk of water-related diseases. Therefore, they could benefit most from improvements that bring water supplies closer to their homes. However, they are least likely to participate in the collective decision-making that will bring this about (Cleaver, 1998).

- **A concern for equality and the interconnection of gender equality with the UNDP’s commitment to sustainable human development**: without specific attention to gender issues and initiatives, projects can reinforce inequalities between women and men and even increase imbalances.
The integration of a gender perspective is part of the UNDP’s commitment to sustainable human development. In UNDP’s overall strategy: “Gender equality is an intrinsic dimension of equitable and sustainable human development. We must apply in our own work the messages of the 1995 and 1996 Human Development Reports to promote gender equality of capacities and opportunities if we are to make a difference in poverty eradication and sustainable livelihoods, environmental regeneration and governance” (UNDP, 1996).

Ideally, the capacity to work with a gender analysis or perspective should be included as one of the core capacities to be developed in the consideration of all issues concerning IWRM. This capacity to identify gender issues should be one of the basic capacities for both individuals and institutions.

Despite the fact that gender issues are a crosscutting theme in IWRM sector, all too often in international and national IWRM programs they are of little consideration.

In the IWRM sector, the concerning programs and the implemented programmes are usually characterized by the lack of certain issues that could be expressed in the following questions:

- Is planning for the project based on an integrated analysis of productive and domestic uses of water?
- Does this analysis recognize the different needs and priorities of women and men?
- In assessing the tradeoffs between competing demands for water, have the different capacities of women and men to express their needs been taken into account?
- Do project activities include measures to ensure that women’s voices will be heard?
- Have sex-disaggregated data base been developed, and can they be used to monitor impacts on women and men respectively?

In order to fulfill the previously mentioned gaps further initiatives are required with major focus on:

- raising the profile of gender issues;
- looking for ways to increase demand for inclusion of gender perspectives in the broad areas of technical support, research and networking;
- devoting specific attention to specialist and expertise; and
- promoting the development and advancement of women professionals.

**Commitments of partners governments and development agencies:** partners, governments and development agencies have made commitments to support greater equality between women and men and to use a gender perspective in environmental initiatives. Specific commitments include:

- the results and follow-up of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade were discussed in New Delhi (1990). Although this discussion has been criticised in recent years for not going far enough on gender issues, there was a clear call for an increase in women's decision-making and management of water resources;
- the Dublin Statement (1992), endorsed by over 100 countries, recognized that women play a central role in providing, managing and safeguarding water resources. It calls for the pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and guardians of the living environment to be reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources;
- principle 20 of the *Rio Declaration* (1992) stated, “Women have a vital role in environmental management and development. Their full participation is therefore essential to achieve sustainable development”. Agenda 21 (1992) contains an entire chapter on women and sustainable development (Chapter 24). The importance of gender was reaffirmed by the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002;
- the *Beijing Platform for Action* (1995) highlighted environmental issues as one critical area of concern (“gender inequalities in the management and safeguarding of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment”). Three strategic objectives were agreed to: (1) involve women actively in environmental decision-making at all levels; (2) integrate gender concerns and perspectives in policies and programmes for sustainable development; and (3) strengthen or establish mechanisms to assess the impact of development and environmental policies on women;
Participatory processes

Experiences show that participatory processes in IWRM initiatives do not automatically recognise inequalities and differences between women and men. Attention to gender differences and inequalities is required if participatory development initiatives are to involve women as well as men. However, in this regard, several specific issues have to be carefully considered: power imbalances in communities, intra-household and intra-family relations, different constraints to participation, different ability to participate and perceived benefits of participation.

Participatory methods, when they are well practiced and properly implemented, gender-sensitive participatory processes challenge organizations in many ways:

- **Skills**: facilitating gender-sensitive participatory processes requires experience, skills and the ability to deal with the conflicts, thus requiring the organizations to develop their capability to do this type of work;
- **Time**: participatory is a long-term process and can take long time and may require support over a period of years;
- **Flexibility and adaptability**: the selection and sequencing of methods should be based on the specific circumstances. Responding adequately to specific contexts requires flexibility;
- **Follow-up**: they should be prepared to respond to the identified priorities; this is a crucial issue for the organizations involved in the promotion of gender issues.

**WHAT IS MEANT BY GENDER APPROACH IN IWRM?**

Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women and the relationship between them. Indeed, it does not simply refer to women or men, but to the way their qualities, behaviours and identities are determined through the process of socialization. In this sense, gender is seen as the social construction of men’s and women’s roles in a given culture or location. These socially determined roles are influenced by historical, religious, economic, cultural and ethnic factors.

In this context, gender refers to the socially determined division of roles and responsibilities and power between men and women. These socially constructed rules are usually unequal in terms of power, decision-making, control over assets and events, freedom of action, ownership of resources, etc.

UNDP, 1995 has defined its gender approach as: Taking account of gender concerns in all policy, program, administrative and financial activities and in organizational procedures, thereby contributing to a profound organizational transformation, specifically bringing the outcome of socio-economic and policy analysis into all decision-making processes of the organization and tracing the outcome. This includes both the core policy decisions of the organization and the small, everyday decisions of implementation.

All governments made commitments to the women and gender equality goals in the Beijing Platform for Action (1995), and recognized gender mainstreaming, “the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in any area and at all levels” (ECOSO, 1997), as the principal means to achieve these objectives.

Regarding gender definition, on one hand, and gender mainstreaming, on the other one, it is to be outlined that gender is fundamentally about power subordination and inequality, whereas gender mainstreaming is about changing these to secure greater equality in all its social manifestations for the disadvantaged members of society, the poor men and women, and thereby it should imply that:

- attitudes, roles and responsibilities of men and women are taken into account, recognizing that both sexes and different social classes do not have the same access to and control over resources and that work, benefits and impacts may be different for the different socio-gender groups;
- considering the needs, roles, capacities, benefits and burdens of men and women, rich and poor, young and old becomes the norm rather than the exception.
Gender Approach in IWRM: Major Elements

There are three elements in an approach to gender and IWRM. Each of these elements supports both project efficiency and a concern for gender equality.

- **The first**: in every initiative, programs and analysis should take steps to understand the differences and relations among and between women and men in each specific context under consideration, in other words, carry out gender analysis. Ideally, this should be done in a participatory fashion and both women and men should be involved;
- **The second**: based on this analysis, all initiatives should incorporate women’s and men’s perspectives, needs and interests and, where possible, promote the advancement of women in order to reduce gender inequalities; and
- **The third**: participatory approaches that facilitate the equitable participation of women and men, especially at decision-making levels.

The importance of involving women as well as men in water resources management is not only to improve women’s situation, but also to provide an essential element for effective development, utilization and management of water resources.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In most developing countries and, particularly those of the Mediterranean, we all recognize the important role mainstreaming gender could play in sustainably solving the increasingly growing problems in the water sector most countries of the region are now facing. However, the crucial question is how gender mainstreaming strategies can be pursued successfully in those countries to achieve a better and sustainable water use and management in all sectors and, particularly, in the agriculture one that consumes over 80% of the available water resources with water losses exceeding 50%. Key lessons learned from experiences in the region clearly indicate that gender mainstreaming in the water sector is surrounded with various difficulties and constrains to achieve the intended sustainable development in water sector. Further efforts should be directed towards a better understanding and improvement of the following aspects.

Understanding of Gender and Gender Mainstreaming

In most countries, due to lack of understanding and the will to change, gender is often thought as side-streamed rather than mainstreamed. The term gender should not be used to refer predominately to women. It is related to how we are perceived and expected to think and act, as women and men, because of the way society is organized, not because of our biological differences. Equally, gender mainstreaming should be understood as a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of polices and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres.

Gender Approach

The gender approach aims at the fullest possible participation of both women and men. This cannot be achieved unless attitudes, roles, and responsibilities of men and women are carefully taken into account. This cannot be easily done, hence, both sexes do not necessarily have the same access to or control over resources and work, benefits and impacts may be different for both groups. To face such a situation successfully, the gender approach requires an open mind capable of leading and organizing both men and women to work together in complete harmony.

Resources and Institutional Support

One of the most significant constraints on progress of gender equality and mainstreaming, is that the resources and institutional support are not yet commensurate with the policy commitments on gender equality, or the requirements of a gender mainstreaming strategy.

Drastic changes are needed in the working environment and in how dialogue is conducted. What is evident is the presence of a male dominated and masculine culture that has inevitable consequences for the values and priorities that are expressed, formally in policy and budget priorities and informally in the discourse and atmosphere of workplace.
Moreover, dialogue even between those involved in gender equality policies and active women’s organizations – is not enabling women’s voices on gender equality to come through. Dialogue should be not only about discussing issues with partners but should also be about listening to their views including their interpretations of gender equality.

Managing Gender Mainstreaming Strategies

This is not any easy process. The failure and/or success are highly a matter of in-house capacity to manage gender mainstreaming strategies at both centralized and decentralized levels. The overuse of external experts to manage and implement gender mainstreaming is not the appropriate approach to be followed. This could create significant difficulties in terms of relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of followed strategies and taken measures.

It is needed to allocate sufficient resources in terms of skilled and knowledgeable staff as well as balancing the capacity at central levels with sufficient capacity at the decentralized ones.

Reassessing Strategy

So far, strategies for gender mainstreaming have placed considerable emphasis on the development of tools and instruments (for analysis, planning, monitoring and evaluation) and on capacity building. What we have now is a multitude of tools and instruments, but in return, their impact is not widely overseen with only few examples of good practice on the ground.

Visibility and Clarity of Gender Equality

There is a continuing need in country strategies, country programmes and interventions for clarity, explicitness and visibility in the statement of gender equality as a goal and priority. Without the clarity called for, there is an evident lack of follow-through. On the other hand, there is a requirement for linkages and ensuring synergies with other goals and issues.

REFERENCES


