



Gender and water

Increased gender equality is key for equitable and sustainable water management. Targeted activities and gender mainstreamed approaches to water supply and resources management increase efficiency and sustainability and promote equitable access to and control over resources, benefits, costs, and decision-making between men and women.

Understanding gender and gender equality | Gender relations are constructed by a range of institutions such as the family, political and legal systems, religious authorities and the market, usually to the disadvantage of women. Intersecting for example poverty, ethnicity, origin, age, disability and sexuality expression gender relations generate complex and multi-layered barriers to dignified, equal and safe lives for all women and girls. They determine who has access to and control over services, goods and resources – and who benefits from the use of them.

Gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of men and women, boys and girls, including equal access to, control over and use of services and resources.

Water supply | In developing societies, women are most often responsible for domestic provision of water and contribute extensively to community water organisations. Despite performing up to 80 per cent of the informal and unpaid water provision work women constitute an average of 17 per cent of the formal and paid water workers in developing countries (IWA, 2014) and hold less than six per cent of all ministerial positions related to water and natural resources (IPU & UN Women, 2015).

Although the MDG target to halve the population without access to drinking water has been met, there are still many women who carry water for the entirety of their lives, keeping them out of school, out of economic development and away from further

Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM)

During menstruation are girl's and women's need for access to clean water and a place to take care of their personal hygiene particularly urgent. The lack of good sanitation facilities in schools and workplaces force girls to drop-out and cause infections, stress and pain.

For more about sanitation, see our Sanitation Issue Sheet.

empowerment. This undermines the potential for poverty reduction and sustainable development. In poor rural households in South Africa, women that fetch water and fuel wood spend 25 per cent less time in paid employment (Valodia & Devey, 2005) and the likelihood of a woman being responsible for water fetching increases the more time is needed per trip (Sorenson et al., 2011). Water fetching also had direct negative effects on women and girls' health by contributing to disabilities (Geere et al., 2010) and increased risks of physical and sexual violence. Yet, women's access to decision-making in regard to overall water management is often removed, dictated by their social and economic position, geographic location and increasingly by market forces.



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Corruption in the water sector affects women disproportionately since they need water for many of their daily chores. In addition, women suffer from gender specific forms of corruption like extortion of sexual favours in exchange for water permits (Cortobius et al., Forthcoming, 2016).

Climate change and natural disasters | Women are especially vulnerable to adverse impacts from climate change. Climate changes usually affect sectors traditionally dominated by women farmers and workers, such as paddy cultivation, cotton and tea plantations and fishing. Prevailing gender inequalities typically result in women facing reduced capacities and access to resources with which to adapt to climate changes than men. Women consequently bear a disproportionate burden of climate change induced consequences. These include decreased food security, shortage of and reduced access to water resources and, given their dependence on natural resources for their daily chores and livelihoods, threatened existence.

Natural disasters tend to impact women and girls more severely than men and boys due to cultural, economic and social disadvantages. Oxfam concluded that more women than men died in the 2004 tsunami in Thailand because women stayed behind to look for children and relatives and they lacked surviving skills like swimming and climbing trees since these are taught to boys, not to girls (Oxfam, 2005). Further, men and boys are sometimes given preferential treatment during rescue and treatment.

Yet, ideas about manhood can also put men at risk. The hurricane Mitch in Central America left more immediate deaths among men because they took greater part in rescuing missions and took less precautionary measures against risks (Bradshaw, 2004).

However, as a result of the prevailing structural inequalities in women and men's economic and social rights women are on the whole more vulnerable to the deadly effects of natural disasters. The more equal men and women are, the smaller the gender difference in mortality (Neumayer & Plümper, 2007).

Agriculture and food security | Despite being the primary producer of food globally and making up the majority of agricultural workers in many countries, women own only 10-20 per cent of the land – a result of discriminatory statutory and/or customary laws preventing women from inheriting or owning land. This hinders women's access to other basic agricultural resources such as water, labour, infrastructure and economic resources (e.g. credits), which tend to be tied to a land title. As a consequence, irregularities in precipitation due to climate change hit women harder; as they rely more on rainfed agriculture their possibilities to maintain continuous food production are compromised (CEDAW, 2013).

Investments in improving agriculture often focuses on heads of household, often the man, even if it often is the woman who is the primary farmer due to (seasonal) migration for work. Further, women tend to focus on multipurpose crops and crops for self-consumption and local markets, while men generally grow cash crops. By not including women in capacity building programmes, technological upgrading and resources transfers the aspired increase in food production and security is compromised. In particular women of indigenous peoples hold traditional

knowledge related to agricultural practices and the use and storage of traditional seed types and crops. These local varieties are often more resistant to plagues, seasonal variations and climate changes. Nonetheless, indigenous women face additional barriers besides gender inequalities as a result of the marginalization and devaluation of their identities that many indigenous peoples suffer from (WWF et al., 2005).

Water governance | Equitable participation in water governance is fundamental for promoting poverty eradication and for sustainable development. Experience show that water projects gain efficiency and sustainability when both women and men are involved in decision-making, supervision and provision of water (WSP & IRC, 2000). Yet, women and men do not have equal access to institutions and decision-making processes that determine the access, allocation, management and regulation of water resources and services. Particularly in international water negotiations are women greatly underrepresented or absent (Earle & Bazilli, 2013).

Water governance at all levels must therefore actively strive towards including women and women's organisations and be guided by multifaceted gender analyses that systematically explore barriers and enabling factors to women's and men's equal participation. Issues to consider include:

- Power relations and barriers to equal participation (within the household and in public spaces) due to gendered roles, responsibilities and workloads
- Differences in ability to participate, e.g. legal restrictions on movement or representation, literacy and education level, economic resources and experience of participating in similar processes
- Differences in perceived accessibility, relevance and costs and benefits of participation
- Social and cultural barriers to qualitative participation.

Aspects such as age, religion/ethnicity, economic status, sexual expression and place of living also affect the resources, opportunities and roles that men and women have, making it imperial to include these in a gender analysis.

Towards gender equality | Gender mainstreaming is a process of making both women's and men's interests and experiences an integral part of any planned action including legislation, policies, and programmes in water. In combination with targeted gender activities to empower women and to sensitize men, mainstreaming is critical to making water governance inclusive, equitable and sustainable (Cap-Net & GWA, 2014). It is also key to reaching the Sustainable Development Goal for Water (Goal 6) as well as the Human Right to Water and Sanitation. Issues important to water projects include:

- Equitable, safe and affordable access to water supply
- Equitable access to land rights and water for productive use
- Access to appropriate and safe sanitation solutions
- Capacity development and employment opportunities
- Participation and equity in decision making
- Equal rights, legal protection and non-discrimination
- Resource mobilisation for advocacy, organization and participation
- Private sector participation, pricing and the right to water
- Climate change, water conflicts and emergencies

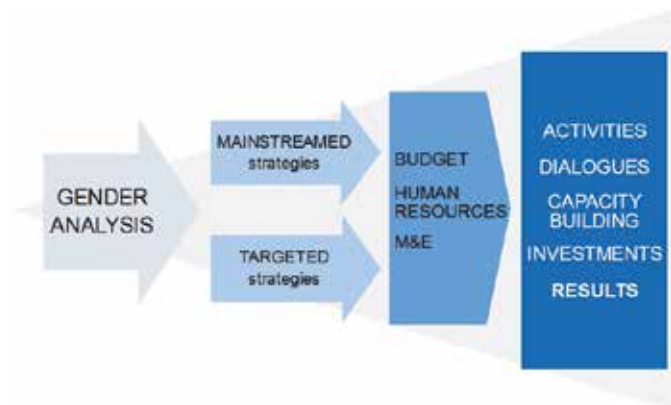


Figure 1. A pathway to gender sensitive interventions

A multidimensional gender analysis containing qualitative and quantitative data is the base for all gender strategies (see Figure 1). Internal capacity building, top-level support, adequate budget and human resources and visibility in the objectives and monitoring and evaluation system of the intervention is key for gender strategies to gain efficiency. To include men in activities that challenge and aim to reshape gender roles reduce risks of backlashes and create a broader support for increased gender equality (UNDP Water Governance Facility at SIWI, 2014).

Our response | It is the ambition of the UNDP Water Governance Facility at SIWI (WGF) that all of our activities contribute to increased gender equality. We strive to make sure that men and women are included in the change processes needed to overcome gendered stereotypes and structural discrimination. We do this by applying both targeted and mainstreamed gender strategies. We believe that women and girls are key agents of change for inclusive and sustainable water governance.

WGF has carried out research related to gender mainstreaming in water governance; health and security risks from water fetching; women's empowerment in local water management and the links between gender and corruption in the water sector. This research has been used to develop gender strategies and training material. In addition, WGF has contributed to the UN's World Water Assessment Programme (WWAP) international Working Group on gender sensitive water monitoring, assessment and reporting, and supported the publication of the Gender, violence and WASH toolkit (House et al., 2014). WGF has also co-convoked several gender seminars at the Stockholm World Water Week. Together with Gender and Water Alliance and UNDP, WGF developed the Resource Guide to Gender in Water Management.

To raise awareness and share knowledge lessons learned from gender mainstreaming in water governance, programmes from WGF and the Stockholm International Water Institute were presented at the 2014 inaugural Gender, development and water conference in South Africa. The conference was hosted by the Water Research Commission of South Africa in partnership with the Department of Water Affairs of South Africa, the African Ministers Council on Water (AMCOW), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Women for Water Partnership.

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The UNDP Water Governance Facility at SIWI (WGF)

The UNDP Water Governance Facility at SIWI (WGF) is a collaboration between the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Stockholm International Water Institute (SIWI). The WGF provides strategic water governance support to low- and middle-income countries to advance socially equitable, environmentally sustainable and economically efficient management of water resources and water and sanitation

services. The ultimate aim is to improve lives and livelihoods and reduce poverty, inequalities and exclusion. The WGF forms part of the UNDP Water and Ocean Governance Programme (WOGP) and receives financial support from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida).

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