



## Gender issues in sustainability of watsan systems

Elizabeth Musoke-Odur, Uganda



GENDER AS A concept connotes classification by sex. It is concerned with socially ascribed roles and relationships between women and men, which are determined - not by biology but by the social, economic, and political context or environment. It indicates the social relations between men and women.

It should be noted that gender is an important variable in the development and sustainability of development projects and those projects and programmes which incorporate gender are more successful than those which do not. It follows therefore that sustainability of water and sanitation systems has to incorporate gender if success is to be registered.

### Issue

This implies differential treatment of an individual or people - a point of contention; a prejudice against an individual/people.

Gender issues therefore are about inequality of treatment of an individual or group of people on the basis of their sex (being male or female). They arise where an instance of gender inequality is recognised as undesirable or unjust.

Since gender issues are not readily understood and in many cases they are associated with women issues, it is important to spend a few minutes to try and clarify what a gender issue is.

### Elements of a gender issue

A gender issue has three elements namely:

- Gender gap.
- Gender discrimination.
- Gender oppression.

### Gender gap

This is when there is a gender bias or prejudice thus causing a difference in numbers on the basis of sex. For example one finds that in many parts of Africa more women are engaged in fetching water for the home than men - creating a gender gap in the fetching of water.

Consequently, more women are concerned with the maintenance and sustainability of water sources than men since it is their socially ascribed field of operation (reproductive role). There are more men in high level water management positions than women. These represent gender gaps respectively.

### Gender discrimination

This is when there is preferential treatment of an individual or people on the basis of their sex. For example in many rural and even urban communities women can only attend meetings but cannot participate in decision making. Decision - making remains the men's responsibility even if those decisions will affect women.

### Gender oppression

This is when one individual or group is disadvantaged as compared to the other through decisions made on the basis of sex. For example if women are denied membership on the water management committee simply because of their sex and yet the committee's decisions will affect the women, then the women are oppressed by being denied the chance to participate in the management of water systems and all its benefits. This becomes a gender issue.

The three elements in a gender issue constitute a gender issue cycle. It can be a vicious cycle if no deliberate move is made to break it.

Where a system is not negative there may only be a gender gap. However, when there is a negative effect on an individual or a group then there is an element of oppression and it becomes an issue. It then calls for some intervention.

There are many socially constructed systems/rules/regulations which perpetuate gender discrimination and this results in gender gaps and gender oppression, for example:

- culture (customary laws);
- religion;

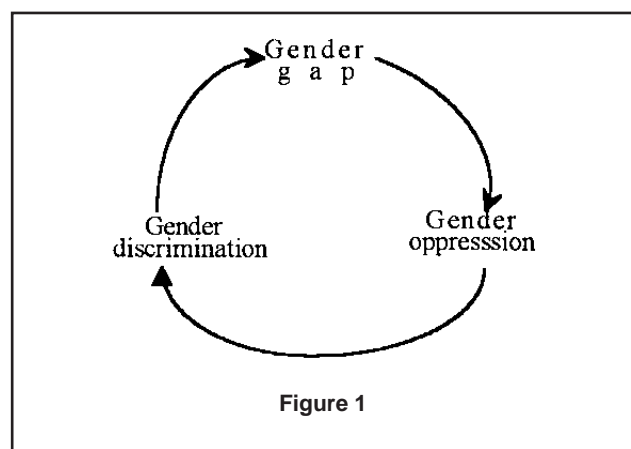


Figure 1

- recruitment;
- nationality ( statutory laws );
- racism;
- political systems;
- economic systems, etc.

### **Gender issues in the sustainability of water and sanitation systems**

In identifying the gender issues in the sustainability of water and sanitation systems we shall use the gender analysis tool or framework. This analysis is usually applied to projects where women's roles and responsibilities have not been explicitly noted but are implicitly assumed in project design, implementation and sustainability. If meaningful sustainability of water and sanitation systems is to be realised, then gender issues have to be given due consideration.

Gender issues in water and sanitation arise because of the social relationships between men and women involved in those activities. Some of the issues identified as important in the sustainability of water and sanitation systems are discussed below.

#### ***Division of labour***

This implies that the activities undertaken in water and sanitation are usually or can be divided on the basis of sex. This might be a result of the cultural norms and values of the community, or may just be a mutual agreement between the parties involved. According to information available, activities under the said sector include:

##### **a) Water supply**

This includes such activities like:

- Hand pump replacement and repair
- Spring protection
- Gravity flow schemes
- Shallow wells
- Rain water harvesting
- Drilling new boreholes in specific areas

Examine each of these activities: who does what? Are both women and men equally involved in each activity? If not, is any of the parties disadvantaged or oppressed in any way? i.e. any gender issue noted in the division of labour (activities analysis)? And when are these activities or tasks carried out? Some of them are regular and have to be done throughout the year (e.g. spring protection etc.). Others are seasonal (e.g. rain water harvesting, etc.)

It is particularly useful to understand the activities calendar for men and women laying out the various tasks - both sector and non - sector - according to the months of the year and obtain some estimate of how much time these tasks take up for each of the parties involved.

For example you may find it very difficult to organise meetings or training seminars for women during the rainy season or even during the morning hours when they

are very busy with farming or household chores. Consequently, if these systems are to be sustained, gender relations have to be duly considered. The question of sustainability arises when one considers the fact that maintenance of the water systems has to be undertaken. Who is to carry out this maintenance? Is it the women who are - so to say - " the water pipes of the home" or by the men who do not fetch or care for that water? Much as the latter are affected if there is a shortage of water, they do not have as much pressure as the women themselves as regards its availability.

This raises the need to train both women and men in the maintenance techniques of water and sanitation systems so as to achieve meaningful sustainability of these systems.

It is gratifying to note that some projects like RUWASA in the eastern part of Uganda have started training women mechanics and maintenance engineers. This will hopefully enhance the sustainability of this important activity.

##### **b) Sanitation and hygiene education**

This involves:

- Promotion of latrine construction at house - hold level.
- Careful siting of demonstration units.
- Slab production.
- Hygiene education to enhance safe and hygienic use of water and sanitation facilities.

Who does what in the above activities? Who makes the decisions? And why is this so? In the 'careful siting of demonstration units' what and who is put into consideration? Is it the women or the men or both ? Who is more likely to attend the demonstrations? Who is mostly involved in the activities being demonstrated? And who is more likely to implement what is being demonstrated? If those activities are to be effectively sustained, then the participation of both women and men has to be given due consideration.

In some projects like RUWASA much has been done to engender most of the above activities, for example:

- There are three men and three women on each Village Water Sub Committee.
- Both women and men are being encouraged to participate in latrine construction.
- The slab production contract has been give to women
- both women and men are being encouraged to participate effectively in decision - making at all levels and in health education campaigns.

##### **c) Training and capacity building**

This involves:

- Putting into place a Community based Management System with effective Water Committees (Are women and men equally represented in the management system? Do they effectively participate in the decision - making process ?)

(Information: In one part of Uganda there is a saying that “What the husband has said is what I (the wife) have said too”!)

- Stores distribution network  
(Are the stores easily accessible to all parties involved? Who is involved in the selling of the spares? Is this fair to all involved?)
- Training personnel at all levels (Are there any gender gaps in training or equal numbers of men and women are trained? Does everyone receive the same training or some are trained in repairs and maintenance? (men) while others (women) are trained in keeping the water source clean?)

The sustainability of these activities depends upon due consideration of the gender issues and full participation of the parties concerned.

The RUWASA project is currently taking a positive step in specifically targeting women in most of their programmes and processes like recruitment, training, and so on in an attempt to achieve some degree of gender balance (reduce the gender gaps).

#### d) Monitoring, research and evaluation

This consists of regular field visits by Senior officers from line ministries, donor agencies like UNICEF, RUWASA and so on. Is there an equal representation of women and men on the monitoring team or not? If not why? Will this affect the results ( findings) of the trip/visit e.g. some issues being overlooked ? If the officers concerned are not gender sensitive they may not notice the gender gaps in the attendance or the division of labour.

It will be noted however that up to now the number of women in the water sector at the managerial level or in the monitoring teams is very minimal.

### Importance of this analysis

This ‘Activity Analysis’ or division of labour analysis will help in recognising:

- Whose labour will be affected by any proposed changes and innovations? For example, if new water systems are to be introduced who will be mainly concerned with their operation, maintenance, and sustainability?
- What are the competing demands on men and women’s time?
- How will or do these affect the implementation of the proposed changes or improvements?

### Access and control

Resources analysis - commensurate with ownership of property and decision-making.

This concerns who has access to and control over which resources. Project and programme decisions are influenced and determined by the availability of resources and control and access to these resources or inputs. The analysis helps in separating by sex and age who has access to

and control over critical resources. Access refers to the ability to use resources. Control refers to the power to decide who uses resources.

We look at the available resources - human, natural, financial and material - and access and control of those resources at the different levels - household, community and national.

- Who (men, women, children ) have access to/control over these resources? For example if a new water source is identified as necessary, who owns the land where it is to be sited? Will everyone have access to the source? Who will be in charge of the source? Will both women and men have a sense of ownership to the source and will both have equal rights to make decisions about the source? Will the age difference matter e.g. where decisions by elders are more respected than those of women?
- Is the absence of particular resources a constraint on the success of the project e.g. land, labour, knowledge and skills, income, etc.
- Is it a constraint for particular categories of people or communities ? Usually women neither own nor control any property. (This arises from the fact that since women are married off at the cost of a dowry, they are as good as one’s property. Property does not own property!
- To what extent are income and expenditure patterns for men and women separate or joint? ( e.g. who pays the water bills?) - access and control of family income.
- To what extent do men and women have control over their own labour? e.g. Do men have control over women’s labour or access to it with the women’s consent?

This analysis helps to look at the constraints to the success of the project and proposed solutions. It looks at the available resources from a gender point of view, who controls them and to whom and how should new resources (e.g. training, credit, inputs, etc.) be made available.

Many projects under the water and sanitation sector are progressively recognising the importance of empowering women with access and control of resources and are all out to promote income - generating projects for women.

### Benefits and incentives

This considers all the end benefits of the project e.g. clean and safe water to drink, better sanitation, etc. and who benefits and who suffers from potential changes in labour demand and resource use. (e.g. a woman might decide to continue fetching water from an unsafe source to avoid travelling long distances to a protected spring).

Incentives are concerned with the motivation to change, to adopt new sanitary /hygienic practices. In WES incentives may be associated with better health and environ-

ment, safe drinking water, reduced expenditure on medical treatment, or labour demand e.g. where a water source is now nearer.

This information helps in understanding whether those who bear the additional cost/burden of the project activities are also the beneficiaries. It is a guide to the incentives for changing current practice and allocation of resources.

In the same vein, if WES activities/systems are to be effectively sustained, the benefits and incentives and to whom they go have to be fully considered.

### **Concluding statement**

It will be appreciated that not all gender - related issues could be discussed within the few minutes given and only the most crucial ones could be highlighted. It should be stressed that for WES development and sustainability to succeed gender issues have to be given due consideration. Women as the key actors in WES have got to be involved and must participate effectively in all activities

of the project from identification, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

However, the womens effective participation will not be realised unless they are fully conscientised to the importance of their roles as agents of development and as copartners in development rather than beneficiaries of development programmes and projects.

Finally, it will be noted that if all these issues are individually analysed, one will find gender gaps, gender discrimination and gender oppression. That qualifies them to be gender issues.

### **References**

- Anderson R. A. and Others. Gender Analysis in Development Planning , 1991.
- Moser, C.O.N. Gender Planning & Development 1993.
- Gender Issues in Development: Selected Modules 1992.
- RUWASA Phase I Progress Reports 1994.
- Women 2000, No.1 1992 Women in Development.