



Integrating gender issues into water programmes

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THE NATURE AND characteristics of a sector is the main determinant of the specific role gender issues will play within it. With the dawn of the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade, this role and the need for each gender type to support one another has been greatly emphasised and its benefits and implications for Water Projects elaborated.

Given the fact that Communities are the main beneficiaries of water projects, it is only imperative that those who comprise it, be given equal opportunity to participate in its provision and delivery. But what often happens, is a situation where men are in the fore, with women in a more silent position. The question is why is this so?

Through this paper, the authors seek to investigate and bring to the fore, some of the factors that militate against the active involvement of women in the sector and to propose some strategies that can be used to incorporate gender issues more effectively into water supply Programmes.

The problem

If great in-roads have not yet been made in the attempt to incorporate gender issues sufficiently into water programmes across board, it is not because Project Management are unwilling to apply a gender approach to project planning and implementation but because Project Management and staff are simply just not aware of the importance of applying a gender approach to project implementation.

Using Ghana as an example, Sector Projects funded by external donor agencies and co-ordinated by the Community Water and Sanitation Division, to date, still exhibit some signs of difficulty with the ability to sufficiently incorporate gender into their activities and implementation. Factors accounting for this situation are many, including the fact that: gender planning is treated as a marginalised and not a main stream activity in the sector, though widely talked about; no policy has been evolved to give legal backing to incorporating gender issues in the sector and therefore, making it a must; no desk officer has been specifically tasked with the responsibility of overall co-ordination and overseeing of gender issues on the Programme, the assumption being that any female staff on the team can handle gender issues sufficiently; lack of knowledge about women's and men's role in the sector; inadequate number of female project staff on projects, thus, limiting village women's involvement in areas where they will always meet with male staff; time, duration and

location of training do not often take women's needs into account and the fact that, visual and training materials are developed without gender considerations in mind.

The way forward/recommendations

If Project activities are to be gender-sensitive, then tools and strategies to deal with the aforementioned problems need to be developed and translated into practice. The following are presented as proposals/suggestions.

Formulation of a sector gender policy

Without community participation in local maintenance and management, facilities are likely to be non-functional at any one time. Therefore, a strategy for user involvement in all phases of the Project is very much required. Together, men and women should plan towards achieving the "community dream" of acquiring water facilities.

In this direction, therefore the sector needs to formulate a policy on gender which will spell out gender considerations for project implementation across board, allowing for adaptations depending on the existing situations in project areas. This policy should end up making gender a "mainstream issue" in sector activities and not an after thought".

The policy among other things should also take cognisance of the varied roles and responsibilities the various gender types perform at both the national, regional and community levels in Project implementation.

Development of gender specific participation strategies

A special strategy for women's involvement is required, in that, when left to chance, women will often not take part in the various project activities and decisions willingly.

Basically, this strategy will define the functions women will play on projects, their level of representation on committees, how they will be involved in decision making, what special staff and training provisions will be made to secure their involvement, both during and after project implementation. Provisions for training will include training for women either exclusively or alongside men, to enhance their capacities and to create more understanding and expertise on the subject of women's involvement among male and female.

Sensitization, capacity building and the application of a gender approach

The application of a gender approach in water and sanitation Projects not only requires a positive attitude towards

gender issues, but also the acquisition of relevant skills. Thus training modules for all categories of staff should have a gender component tailored towards their specific job performance with the aim of sensitizing all on the need to ensure women's participation in projects.

Applying a gender approach helps women and men to recognize and re-value existing patterns and to look for possible actions to improve the balance. It thus becomes an effective approach to give more opportunities to women and to have men share the burden and recognize women as equal partners. It provides mechanisms for work, control and benefits.

In more specific terms, women at the national and regional levels should be involved in Project planning and management. They should also serve as front-line staff in community mobilization and animation activities so as to serve as role models to their fellow women in the community who in most cases have very low esteem of themselves, and therefore do not participate actively in project implementation.

A designated senior member of staff should have responsibility for gender issues to ensure incorporation of gender concerns in the programme.

Project identification and assessment

The identification and assessment phase seeks to collect and assess baseline data on needs, priorities of men and women, of resources available and the willingness to participate. Knowledge, needs and priorities of men and women may differ and women's access to and control over information and resources usually lag behind. Women may have more detailed knowledge on water sources, water use, etc. than men. This makes it imperative to make sure that they are being heard. All data collected need to be gender-specific, reflecting the knowledge, needs, priorities and commitment of men and women.

Another reason for data to be gender-specific is to prevent a future overburdening of women in the course of a project, especially in cases where they have a heavier workload than men. One-sided information may easily lead to wrong assumptions, thus, it is important to assess the impact of a project on women and men in advance.

Development of gender sensitive materials

Participatory training materials for sensitization and discussions on gender issues should be developed and used where necessary, to develop self-esteem and leadership skills for female staff and community members. These materials, however, should be non-controversial and be designed in such a way that they are acceptable to all.

Identification of gender roles in relation to project implementation

There is the need to identify tasks related to project implementation and decide on which gender type should be responsible for the performance of those tasks. Implementation of a project brings about a lot of work, espe-

cially for the community, and therefore needs to be planned carefully. Often times, project staff seem to have some kind of mental idea about what women and men should do and when they should do it as regards the project cycle. This approach though useful at times is not really the best, in that, it does not always do justice to what both women and men are capable of doing and does not consider their availability at certain times. This could lead to a situation where resources may be left untapped or not optimally used.

The ideas of Project staff on task division may also cause an unfair burden on either the women or the men. Involvement of women and men in identifying and allocating tasks helps to prevent this. It also helps to create a commitment towards their share in the work to be done.

Empowerment of women

Project policies should address both the practical and strategic gender needs of beneficiaries, especially women. As such, leadership and self-esteem training should be organized for women members of WATSAN Committees. Women should also be targeted for training as pump mechanics, latrine artisans, caretakers etc. Women selected for leadership positions such as treasurer, chairperson etc. should be provided with the skills to facilitate their work. Where feasible, women should be encouraged to undertake income-generating activities and be engaged by contractors on projects for a fee. Women should be encouraged to choose their own representatives to ensure trust, ease of contact and leadership. Meetings should be timed to allow for participation by women. Existing women's groups should be a target for mobilizing women and for other community mobilization activities. Seating arrangements for community meetings should be gender sensitive and allow for contributions from and participation by women. Women should be incorporated in the projects as decision makers and should be consulted in the selection and siting of facilities. Pilot studies should include gender-oriented analysis and the project should ensure that the needs and priorities of women are assessed.

Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation must be seen as an important component of any gender strategy. It would however be necessary for information to be desegregated on the basis of gender. Therefore community members should be involved in defining indicators for evaluating the impact of gender on projects. Women beneficiaries of projects should also be involved in generating community-specific gender indicators for assessing the performance of the programme, as men and women do not necessarily experience the benefits of projects in the same way.

Women should be targeted in data collection as respondents when gathering relevant data for measuring the impact of the programme. The use of participatory rural appraisal methods should be encouraged to generate data for the evaluation of projects.

A gender strategy will be effective if appropriate objectives are set and relevant activities are planned for its implementation. This would however depend on the allocation of adequate human and material resources.

Conclusion

To conclude, since women have usually been forgotten in the past, they frequently need to have their concerns stated and highlighted in order to be recognized. However, this should not translate into new, undue burdens on women, especially those that men might share with them. And unless men are aware of and support women's involve-

ment in projects, in many cultural contexts women's participation will be curtailed. Water and sanitation is a sector which fundamentally affects the lives of community women, men and children. Therefore, all need to be appropriately involved in determining sector activities. In this process, sector experiences can have much to offer to the field of gender issues.

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