

# Water Resource Management: Instilling Gender Equity for Efficient Development Outcomes

Water resource management policies, particularly those involving the use and management of water, impact women more severely than men because of women's gendered responsibilities of often being the primary managers of water for both agricultural and human health purposes.

Women's participation in the utilization and management of water resources must be considered in the broader context of their access to productive assets and resources and the social construction of gender roles. Women are significant users of water, both for productive and domestic purposes, but they rarely have input into water related decision making, at the macro or even the micro level.



Water rights are often closely tied to land tenure arrangements, and often transferred with land. In many places, land rights are passed from father to son. Thus, though women may be working on the land, they lack ownership and usufruct rights.

## Gender mainstreaming in the Water Resources Sector Strategy (WRSS)

There is growing international consensus around the importance and benefits of integrating gender concerns in water resource management, as evident in the 1992 Dublin Principles and in the commit-

ments made at the 2003 Third World Water Forum in Kyoto. In view of this experience, the World Bank is poised to both leverage benefits of research and capacity-building done by other donors and NGOs, as well as to apply lessons learned in the Bank's water resource lending program.

Dublin Principle 3 states that women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. However, this pivotal role of women as providers and users of water and guardians of the living environment has seldom been reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources. Acceptance and implementation of this principle requires positive policies to address women's specific needs and to equip and empower women to participate at all levels of water resource programs, including decision-making and implementation, in ways defined by them.

The integration of gender in the World Bank's water policy, has evolved from the 1993 WRM Policy Paper to the current Water Resources Sector Strategy (WRSS). The 1993 document mainly stresses women's role in the water and sanitation subsector, citing positive evidence of the effect of women's participation in water users associations, as well as in assessments and decisions regarding site selection and the placement of handpumps (1993: 56).

In the recently approved WRSS (2004) of the World Bank, gender integration is more systematic. Gender issues are presented in relation to a number of water subsectors. Citing the Dublin Principle regarding women's central role in WRM, the WRSS details a number of areas where gender issues should be considered. Specifically, the WRSS continues to emphasize women's participation in urban/rural water supply and sanitation (U/RWSS) particularly in management

reforms, while also expanding the discussion to include:

1. A new focus on women's role as farmers in water users' associations in irrigated agriculture;
2. The need to protect women's informal customary rights to water; and
3. An emphasis on the benefits poor women in particular garner from reforms in the energy, irrigation, and water supply sectors (2004).

The WRSS also notes some gender-positive project impacts, particularly past success in Northeast Brazil with a large-scale irrigation project leading to a dynamic rural economy and the creation of "high-quality, permanent jobs, of which (forty percent held by women." Similar labor market success is noted in India in terms of wage smoothing for agricultural labor (again highly feminized) as a result of water sector investments (2004: 7).

The strategy also notes with approbation the case of the Uttar Pradesh Sodic Lands Project (in drainage and reclamation) where women's micro-credit groups managed credit funds successfully, but the men's groups did not perform so well. In addition, The World Bank Gender Strategy elaborates how gender programming can help meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). WRM-specific contributions to the MDGs could be made through enhanced integration of gender issues within such project investments as water supply and sanitation; environmental health and vector-borne diseases; and groundwater recharging for environmental sustainability.

As in many other sectors also in water resource management, the most effective projects combine gender-sensitive analysis and management throughout the project cycle.

#### Examples of Gender-Focused Components from World Bank Water Resources Projects with Specific Funding towards Gender

Bangladesh Fourth Fisheries Project	USD 0.2 million of 60.8 million total project costs is allocated for training of shrimp fry collectors (customarily women and children)
Morocco Fisheries Development	Unspecified portion of a subcomponent of USD 0.4 million (of total project cost 12.9 million) will go to train women in fish processing and also to establish a separate women's unit
UP Sodic Lands II	Unspecified portion of a subcomponent of 138.3 million of a 286.6 million project is allocated for on-farm development and land reclamation including male and female user groups and women's self-help groups for credit services

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