Overview

In an effort to promote equal access to resources and participation of women in water governance structures, the Kenyan Ministry of Water and Irrigation and the International Development Association (IDA)-financed Water and Sanitation Service Improvement Project formed a partnership to strengthen gender mainstreaming capacities among newly appointed Gender Desk Officers in institutions across the country. With a firm commitment from the government of Kenya, with newly implemented incentives and penalties for Ministry staff to address gender inequality in their work, important steps are being taken to ensure the women of Kenya are given equal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes that directly affect their daily lives. However, implementation capacity remains a major challenge. To redress this capacity gap, the World Bank’s Gender Action Plan provided funding for a series of trainings for Gender Desk Officers to strengthen their capacities to mainstream gender into their daily work.

Challenge

During the drought, women and girls in Kenya often travel far on foot in search of water from distant wells, ponds, or trucked-in water for farming or personal use. This strenuous and time-consuming activity to meet the water needs of the family often forces girls out of school and prevents women from fully pursuing economic activities. While equal access to resources and participation of women in water governance structures figures prominently in the government of Kenya’s Vision 2030, the current lack of capacity in the water sector remains a major challenge in achieving the government’s goals.

Approach

To address the capacity gaps in the country’s water sector, the IDA-financed US$150 million Water and Sanitation Service Improvement Project (WASSIP) and the Ministry of Water and Irrigation (MoWI) formed a collaboration aimed at strengthening gender mainstreaming capacities across the country. With additional funding from the World Bank Group’s Gender Action Plan, the collaboration brought together experts from various ministries, the National Bureau of
Statistics, United Nations (UN) agencies such as the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), and civil society organizations to provide a series of workshops targeting newly appointed Gender Desk Officers (GDO). A detailed needs assessment questionnaire prior to the first workshop in Nairobi in March of 2010 provided the opportunity to tailor the training to the needs of the participants. Through practical sessions, discussions, and presentations these men and women—few of whom had received any form of prior training on gender—were introduced to relevant policy issues, how to integrate gender in results-based program management, and given the opportunity to review critically gender issues in the water and sanitation sector. To further strengthen and develop this evolving Community of Practice, a follow-up workshop was held three months later in Mombasa. This event was an opportunity to review early progress and revise action plans for the following financial year.

Results

As a result of the two training workshops, gender mainstreaming activities are underway within a range of institutions across Kenya, and substantial progress has been recorded since the first workshop. Several participants have managed to mobilize funding from existing programs to undertake preliminary awareness-raising activities and initiate sex-disaggregated data collection. Other actions include the formation of institutional gender committees; commencement of the development of institutional gender policies; and integration of gender in the budget for the following financial year. This initiative has proven that relatively small financial contributions (US$35,000 from the Gender Action Plan) can help leverage the additional funding and resources needed to produce vital impacts on the ground. The initiative is emerging as a successful example, which other ministries are regarding with interest; a similar initiative may be undertaken in the energy sector as well.

Partners

The project has leveraged a partnership between the Ministry of Water and Irrigation and the Global Water and Sanitation Program, as well as representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Gender and Water Alliance) who have been collaborating to develop the curriculum. In addition, representatives from other ministries and state institutions (Ministry of Gender, Kenya National Bureau of Statistics) and UN agencies (United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and UNIFEM) collaborated to undertake the training.

Toward the Future

The Ministry of Water and Irrigation has expressed interest to roll out the approach to train gender officers at district levels and in water companies. Several knowledge products have been developed and the results of the initiative have been shared at several occasions, including seminars in Stockholm (Swedish International Development Cooperation Authority (Sida) and at the World Bank office in Juba, South Sudan. A proposal to engage the established Community of Practice (CoP) in exchange visits has also been submitted to the South-South Experience Exchange Trust Fund. This would give members of the CoP the opportunity to learn from the experiences of other successful countries such as Egypt, India and Peru.