

Integrating Gender into Water – A practical Guide

This practical guide is one of a series written to support all SDC staff in ensuring that gender issues are taken into account transversally in different thematic domains – in this case, water sanitation and hygiene. The guide aims at connecting water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) and the broader water resources management (WRM) being evident from the water cycle.

The guide outlines key gender issues regarding water access, use and management, and how these can be integrated into the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of cooperation strategies, programme and project interventions by SDC South and East Cooperation, Global Cooperation, as well as Humanitarian Aid.

Introduction

Context

The particular characteristics of water make its governance more complex than most other natural resources.

- Water can take different forms (ice, vapour) and can be found at the surface, underground, in the soil and in the air;
- its use can be consumptive or non-consumptive¹;
- it is both a common pool resource and an economic good;
- It is mobile and crosses administrative boundaries including national borders;
- access to clean water and sanitation is a human right.

At the beginning of the millennium, the United Nations stated that “*the water crisis is essentially a crisis of governance and societies are facing a number of social, economic and political challenges on how to govern water more effectively*” (UN, 2003). The objectives of efficiency, equity and sustainability assigned to water governance are indeed potentially conflicting. In 2015 UN Member States recognized a holistic standalone goal on clean water and sanitation covering all aspects of the water cycle as well as a standalone goal on gender equality. This is a major step towards better water governance, reflected in SDC approach which promotes a holistic view of the water cycle combined with gender equality, such as outlined in the Swiss Dispatch 2017 – 2020 where Gender Equality is a strategic standalone goal and a transversal theme.



In history, global water and sanitation governance has been marked by the following major steps:

- In 1992, the **Dublin Principles** stated that water has an economic value and in its competing uses should be considered as an economic good; water should be recognised as a scarce and vulnerable resource; participatory approaches to water resource management are needed; and women play a key role in water management. These principles framed in large part the integrated water resource management (IWRM) approach.
- **The UN Human Rights Resolutions to Water and Sanitation** in 2010. The United Nations recognized that "The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights". The right to water is also defined as the right of everyone to sufficient, safe, acceptable and physically accessible and affordable water for personal and domestic uses.
- **The UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 6 on Ensuring the Availability and Sustainable Management of Water and Sanitation**, Agenda 2015-2030. In 2015, a Development Goal was

¹ Non-consumptive use of water does not reduce the quantity of water; for example, recreational fishing.

² Critical intersections between SDG 5 and SDG6 are provided in Global Water Partnership / GWP, Gender Equality and Inclusion in Water Resources Management, 2017.

dedicated to water and sanitation in a holistic manner covering the entire hydrological cycle: SDG 6 “Ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”. The focus was also broadened from drinking water supply and sanitation to integrated water resources approaches encompassing upstream and downstream water management while increasing the efficiency of water use.

- The concept of **Water Security** has become preeminent in face of the looming water crisis. UN-Water (2013) defines water security as “the capacity of a population to safeguard sustainable access to adequate quantities of acceptable quality water for sustaining livelihoods, human well-being, and socio-economic development, for ensuring protection against water-borne pollution and water-related disasters, and for preserving ecosystems in a climate of peace and political stability.”
- **The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP)**. Water was seriously addressed at the COP21 in Paris (2015) with a specific ‘water action’ day. In addition most nationally determined contributions (INDCs) identified water as a key priority for climate change adaptation.

While improved governance from local, national to global levels is clearly required, it is challenged by **fragmentation and unclear responsibilities** of the organisations in charge. At present global water resources are under increasing pressure exacerbated by population growth, competition between sectors (including ‘out of the water box’ sectors such as energy) and the effects of climate change.

In 2015, the UN called the international community to prepare for “a new era of **hydrodiplomacy**³” to enable negotiation of water agreements beyond the national level, especially for transboundary river basins. Hydrodiplomacy has also become relevant for addressing water challenges in relation to other global issues such as sustainable development, climate change and food security.

Gender issues

- **Poor water supply, sanitation and hygiene primarily affect women and girls**

While access to clean water and improved sanitation has become a human right in 2010, the number of people lacking such access is still dramatically high. In developing countries, women and girls are often responsible for the collection and management of household water supply (for drinking and domestic use), sanitation and hygiene. Poor water supply services directly impact their time spent to collect water and poor sanitation in public spaces like schools (notably the absence of toilets or separate toilets) strongly affects girls’ attendance and their education. Violence against women and girls have been reported to occur in public toilets, open defecation sites, but also places to collect water, bathe and washing clothes. In particular, menstrual hygiene appears to be an important factor of vulnerability for women and girls. The relationships between gender inequalities and poor sanitation, health issues and poverty are thus being increasingly recognised.

- **Lack of women’s access to land and water disproportionately reinforces inequalities**

In developing countries, medium and large scale agriculture used to be a male dominated activity. Women are mostly involved in small scale farming and home gardening. However most women do not own the land they farm as they are not allowed to buy or lease land. This also excludes them from access to irrigation water that is usually related to land property rights. Water interventions may disproportionately reinforce inequalities and women can be left behind or worse, they can be harmed by improved water productivity or water use efficiency projects. Gender asymmetries in access to water services and land tenure thus need to be taken into account not only to progress towards more efficient and equitable water management, but also not to reinforce gender inequality.

- **Water governance and policy often overlooks the central role of women**

Despite progress in the area of domestic water supply and sanitation, the central role of women in water use and management is often overlooked by policy makers. Moreover women tend not to participate to water governance and decision-making mainly because of their lack of confidence and skills, social norms and unequal power relations. Water governance and policies thus need to increase their responsiveness to differentiated gender aspects in the management of water, as well as in the institutions themselves. For example, pricing of water services should take into account the right to

³ Hydrodiplomacy is also called water diplomacy.

meet the basic human needs handled by women (e.g. xx) and the affordability of vulnerable households.

- **Spotlight on the role of women in transboundary contexts**

Gender inequality is prevalent in transboundary water governance at national, regional and international levels. Notably, most institutions responsible for transboundary water governance are not gender sensitive, despite international recognition of the importance of women's participation in decision-making and governance mechanisms. Low political will and lack of know-how often hamper inclusion of gender dimensions and representation of women in transboundary governance arenas. To address this, initiatives promoting the role of women in water diplomacy are exploring and developing gender sensitive practices in cooperation, peace and security

Concepts and Definitions: What does 'Gender and Water' mean and imply?

In this practical guide 'Gender, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene' refers to the different roles, responsibilities, rights and power of men and women and their relations in the use, management and governance of water resources and delivery of related services.

The Swiss approach links sustainable water resource management and equitable access to water and sanitation services as outlined in SDG 6. The gender dimension is relevant to all aspects of SDG 6.

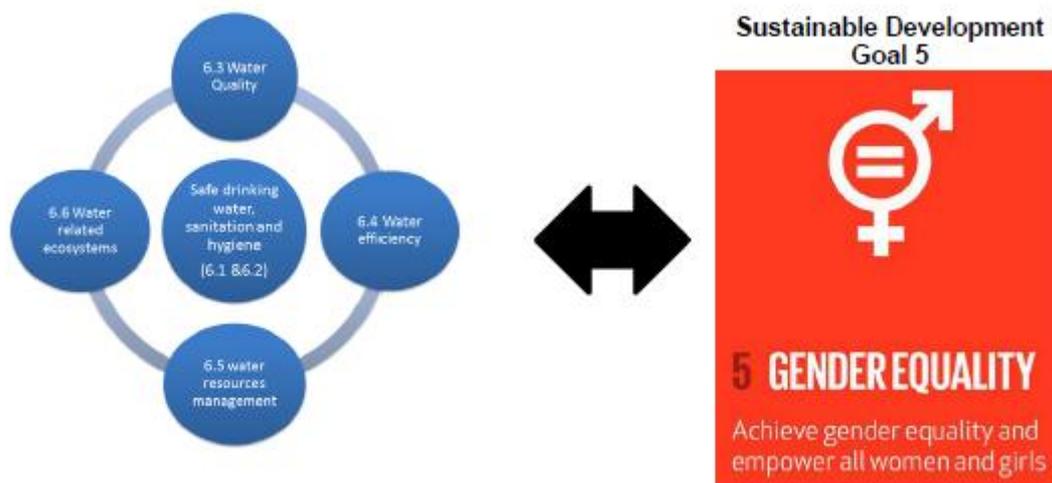


Figure 1. Elements of Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG6) – Gender Equality (Goal 5) is relevant to all aspects of water management.

Women and men have different roles, needs and interests in the use, management and governance of water resources. For example, in developing countries women primarily use water for multiple domestic purposes and for small scale agriculture while men's priorities revolve around irrigated agriculture and livestock rearing. These differences influence how individuals will respond to changes and make choice, both individually and collectively. Gender dimensions thus determine the different options offered to men and women and the benefits they derive from water resources and water interventions. It must be noted that in development and humanitarian aid interventions attention given to women tends to be higher since a key objective is to reduce gender inequality.

Understanding gender dimensions is therefore essential to distribute the benefits of water projects equally and increase the impact and sustainability of their outcomes. Ensuring that the whole project cycle takes gender into consideration usually requires a **deliberate strategy of gender mainstreaming**. This strategy aims to embed the interests, needs and issues of men and women in the design, analysis, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of water projects. This also implies supporting the involvement of women into water interventions as well as in the management and governance of water. Specific mechanisms may still be required to increase the likelihood that women

will be genuinely involved. The UN Special Rapporteur on Water and Sanitation in his report on Gender Equality recommends strengthening women's voice, e.g. providing them with opportunities for meaningful participation, decision-making and access to and control of resources. The Special Rapporteur particularly draws attention on the necessity to break patterns of societal acceptance of exclusion and violence based on gender norms and recognizes the fact that "young people may grow up as change makers and therefore curricula in all schools should challenge gender stereotypes and encourage critical thinking".

In the governance of water, both consideration of gender issues as well as enhanced participation and empowerment of women are required to build an enabling environment.

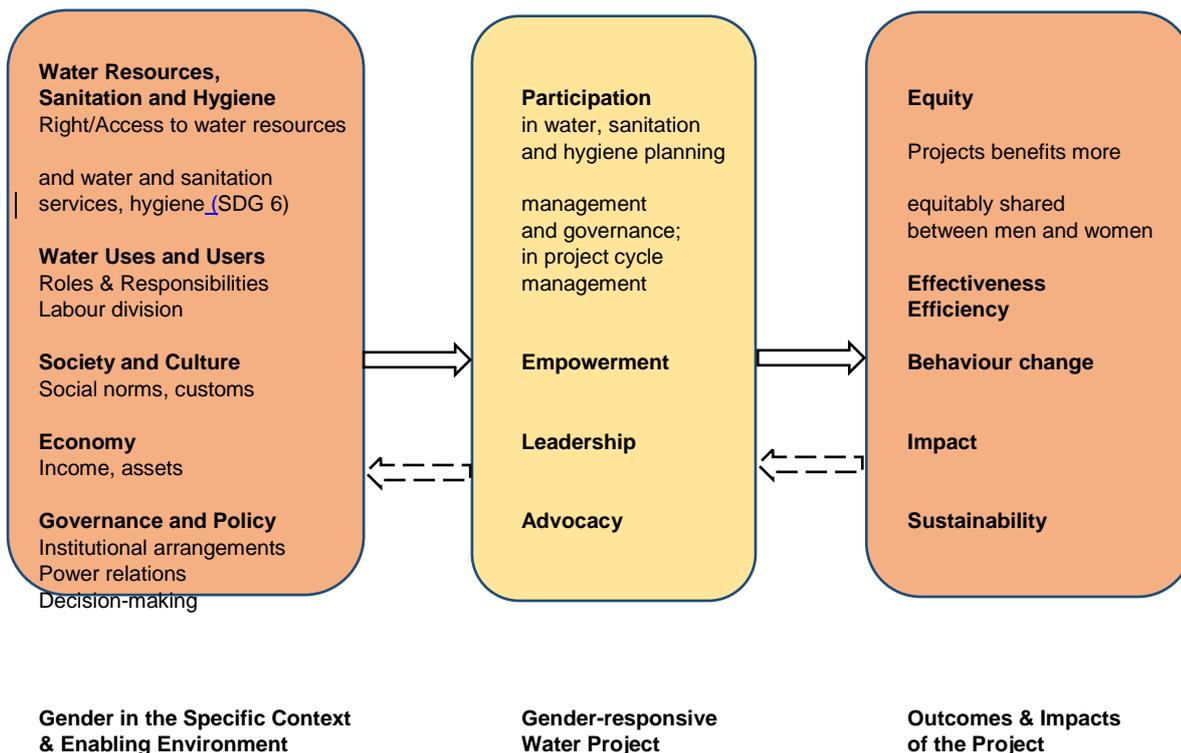
Humanitarian aid: Natural disasters and violent crises such as war and turmoil are not gender-neutral in their impact. While they may challenge traditional gender roles (i.e. women taking over the breadwinner's role) they often exacerbate existing gender inequalities in terms of time-use/time burden, socio-economic vulnerability (although not all women are vulnerable!), access to and control over resources, access to services including reproductive health services, mobility, participation and gender-based violence. The collection of water – the responsibility of women and children in many cultures - becomes more time-consuming and strenuous in the aftermath of a disaster or in a war as water points may be located further away, dramatically increasing exposure to gender-based violence with one in five women or girls likely to become victim of sexual violence (adolescent girls are at particular risk) in humanitarian settings. The risk of gender-based violence is further exacerbated by isolated and unsafe locations of water points or sanitation facilities, lack of lighting, locks, privacy and separate sanitation facilities for women and men, tensions with host communities over water resource and socio-economic vulnerability favouring sexual exploitation. Inappropriately designed WASH programmes where women and children have not been involved can result in facilities not being used, or used incorrectly. This not only risks affecting safe and equitable access to water and sanitation facilities but may also put communities at risk of disease outbreaks (i.e. when sanitary facilities are too far away or inappropriate and women therefore resort to open defecation at night). Outbreak of diseases, in turn, adds to the burden of women and girls as traditional care-takers of sick family members. Girls may drop out of school due to inappropriate sanitary facilities (i.e. same-sex toilets, no safe disposal of sanitary material) in temporary or damaged schools. Limited access to culturally appropriate sanitary pads and safe disposal/washing/drying may negatively affect women's mobility to access humanitarian assistance. Besides restrictive cultural norms, women and girls' ability to participate in humanitarian programming and decision-making is further hampered by reduced mobility, an increased workload and lacking safety.

In the area of **domestic water supply, hygiene and sanitation, the water sector has been a pioneer in implementing gender mainstreaming approaches.** A range of approaches and practices have been developed, such as the example given below.

*A water supply, sanitation & hygiene (WASH) project in the rural areas of Amhara Region, Ethiopia has introduced **WASH specific capacity building activities for couples** with the objective to enhance active and meaningful participation of the community, and in particular of women in WASH related activities. Capacity building elements included training sessions, an experience sharing visit to a gender sensitive community and monthly community discussions. As a result, changes of attitude and behaviour among the couples were observed, which went beyond pure WASH related aspects, including reduction of domestic violence among the participating couples. Besides, the trained couples acted as promoters of good WASH practices. This piloted approach of capacity building of couples can bring significant changes in ensuring gender equality and in sustaining promoted WASH approaches in rural areas.*

Analytical and Operational Framework

While no specific framework is commonly used to address gender in water interventions, a general framework is proposed here to illustrate how water and sanitation projects can systematically address, understand and analyse gender dimensions in development and humanitarian aid interventions. In all cases, gender dimensions need to be addressed from the outset of the project, i.e. during the design phase and not only during implementation. Projects that **mainstream gender** are qualified as **gender-responsive**.



This analytical framework is sought to be as generic as possible and to be used in various contexts at any scale(s) or institutional level(s). The three main components: i) Specific context, ii) Gender-responsive project and iii) Outcomes and Impacts, are described below.

Gender & Water in the Specific Context

The specific context in which the project is implemented can be local, sub-national, national or even international, such as in transboundary river basins.

Gender dimensions are first identified and analysed through all biophysical, socio-economic and institutional factors that characterise the specific context. Notably: i) the types of water resources and services, ii) the water uses and users, iii) the society, culture and economy, and iv) the water governance and policy. Examples of key analytical questions are given in the table below.

GENDER & WATER IN THE SPECIFIC CONTEXT
WATER RESOURCES and WATER SERVICES <i>Is access to each type of water resource or service differentiated by gender?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who (men and women) has access and the right to use the different types of available water resources (rivers, lakes, groundwater, reservoirs, etc.)? - Who (men and women) has access and the right to use the different types of water services? - How does water pollution differently affect the health of women, men and children?
WATER RESOURCE/SERVICE USES and USERS <i>How is the water resource or service used and how is labour divided?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How do men and women use the different water resources/services and for which purpose? - What are the roles and responsibilities of men and women for each type of water use/service? - How is labour divided?
SOCIETY and ECONOMY <i>How does the socio-economic context influence gender and water?</i>
<p>Society</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How social divisions (e.g. ethnicity, religion, class, age, geographic location) affect gender relations? - Do social norms constrain the roles and responsibilities of women in water use and management? - Are there customary rights limiting women's access and use of water? <p>Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who is benefiting from the economic opportunities created by the development of water resources and services? - Who and to which extent can men and women generate income from water productive use?
WATER GOVERNANCE and POLICY <i>How and by whom will the policy be implemented and managed?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who in the target area has control over water resources? - Who makes what decisions? What is the influence and power of men and women in negotiation and decision-making? - What laws or policies affect questions of ownership and control in relation to water (for instance, inheritance laws)? - Are men and women differently affected by conflict and do they seek to resolve conflict differently? - What traditional structures exist to mediate conflict over water use? What is the status/power of women in these structures? - How are the different gender needs and perspectives negotiated within institutions? - Are institutional policies developed in an inclusive and gender-sensitive manner?

In emergency situations, specific policy tools have been developed to guide gender assessment (see last section of this guide providing an overview on practical guides and tools).

Since contextual factors often play a major role in differentiating the opportunities and constraints faced by men and women, this analysis provides insights on the enabling or hindering environment in which water projects are being implemented.

Gender-responsive Water Projects

In the middle part of the framework, the gender-responsive projects aim to optimise the benefits of water interventions for both men and women. For this purpose, projects often need to address existing gender inequalities and promote the genuine participation of women, their empowerment and leadership in the management and governance of water resources and water services.

GENDER-RESPONSIVE WATER PROJECTS
PARTICIPATION
<p>Gender-responsive projects are careful in representing the views and interests of each category of stakeholders identified by gender. Women often face various obstacles when attempting to participate in water management/governance or in project implementation.</p> <p>Projects may need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Assess whether the needs, interest and priorities of men and women are taken into account.→ Introduce mechanisms to increase the likelihood that women participate in water management and governance, and that their views and interests are considered.→ Ensure that women genuinely participate to project implementation (stakeholders, staff, partners), including monitoring and evaluation
EMPOWERMENT
<p>Gender-responsive projects are careful in balancing the power and influence of each category of stakeholders identified by gender. One of the major factors hindering women's contribution is not only their low self-confidence but also their lack of relevant skills.</p> <p>Projects may need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Strengthen women's skills and access to information, knowledge and technology→ Introduce mechanisms to initiate or support women's empowerment
LEADERSHIP
<p>Gender-responsive projects are careful in balancing the leadership of men and women in water management/governance and in project implementation.</p> <p>Projects may need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">→ Strengthen women's skills in water projects' and organisations' leadership→ Promote women's leadership in water governance bodies, for example in drinking water supply committees, in water users associations, or as water operators→ Build awareness and advocate for increased leadership of women

Outcomes and Impacts of Gender-responsive Water Projects

In the right part of the framework, the outcomes and impact of gender-responsive water projects have improved the gender dimensions of water use, management and governance, or at least they have not perpetuated or increased gender inequality. Human behaviour regarding gender relations have changed, and the benefits of water resources and water services are distributed more effectively and more equitably among the different types of water users, including the more vulnerable women. Overall outcomes and impact of gender-responsive water projects are likely to be more sustainable in the long term.

Yet in situations where technical objectives (e.g. increased water productivity) of water projects might negatively affect women, for example through its impact on labour division or land property rights, gender-specific interventions targeting women would still be required. In such cases, measures preventing or mitigating negative impacts on women should be proposed and identified. The box below provides an example of such a gender-specific water intervention.

In the province of Punjab in Pakistan, the Water Productivity (WAPRO) project funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and conducted by HELVETAS in collaboration with Mars Food, aims to increase the productivity of water through the promotion of water stewardship crop

production. Women are mainly involved in rice transplantation, a work that creates significant health hazards, and that diverts part of their earnings to health care.

By adopting new sowing methods and production technology like dry seeding, transplantation will not be needed anymore, changing the gender division of labour and questioning the future role of women in the rice value chain. In response, the project planned to progressively propose to women other labour options, for example weeding. In addition, new income alternatives outside rice farming were explored, such as brick making in factories, producing crafts, collecting strawberries or peas, and livestock rearing.

In **humanitarian aid**, recognition of critical gender issues and gender-based violence has led to the development of gender-sensitive programs. **key recommendations for gender-sensitive humanitarian programming could be added.* The **Sphere Handbook**, a key reference tool in terms of humanitarian standards, has integrated critical gender aspects, including in the sectoral chapter on WASH. The handbook, among others, states the importance of ensuring women's participation in water supply and sanitation programmes, including in decision-making and local management to facilitate safe and equitable access to WASH facilities.

SDC Practices: Implementing Gender in water interventions

Addressing Gender in Transboundary Water Cooperation

Integration of gender in the policies of transboundary water governance received a boost in the Lower Mekong Region through a [workshop co-organised by Oxfam and IUCN](#) in 2016 in the context of the BRIDGE project. The [BRIDGE \(Building River Dialogue and Governance\) project](#) aims to build water governance capacities through learning, demonstration, leadership, and consensus-building in transboundary hotspot river basins. Facilitated by IUCN and financed by the Water Diplomacy Programme of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), BRIDGE is a multi-regional project, implemented in 14 river basins located in South America, Meso-America, Africa and Asia. In Asia, the BRIDGE project focuses on the 3S Basins (Sekong, Sesan and Sre Pok rivers shared by Cambodia, Vietnam and Lao PDR). Since 2011, the project has provided opportunities for dialogue and training on hydrodiplomacy, and produced data and studies to support technical discussion for stakeholders from different sectors and levels.

Addressing gender in policy influencing activities

The example of **menstrual hygiene management in Nepal** (box below) shows how a **global institution** like the **United Nations Water Supply & Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC)** and **NGOs have complemented each other** to enhance the national water policy. In Nepal, the Ministry of Water Supply and Sanitation (MoWSS), in collaboration with WSSCC hosted a high-level Menstrual Hygiene Management (MHM) Policy Consultation workshop to initiate the development of a policy framework on MHM in Nepal.

The Swiss NGO Water Consortium partners in Nepal organized a **regional workshop** in the Dang-district on 5-6 Feb 2017. Representatives from the ministries, departments, three regional directors (WASH, Health and Education), governmental organizations and INGO from 18 districts participated and developed the "Dang Declaration Paper on MHM in Schools" that contains 15 important points related to MHM policy. The Swiss NGO Water Consortium partners presented the same declaration paper in the "**National MHM policy consultation workshop**" which took place a few days later (9-10 Feb) in Kathmandu with the support of UN WSSCC. There, it was agreed to take the Dang declaration paper as a reference paper while finalising the national MHM policy.

A Case Study on addressing Gender from Humanitarian Aid

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Promoting Gender in Water Stewardship Programmes with the Private Sector

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In the province of **Punjab in Pakistan**, the **Water Productivity (WAPRO) project** funded by the **Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)** and conducted by **HELVETAS in collaboration with Mars Food**, aims to **increase the productivity of water through the promotion of water stewardship crop production**. Women are mainly involved in rice transplanted, a work that creates significant health hazards, and that diverts part of their earnings to health care. By adopting new sowing methods and production technology like dry seeding, transplanted will not be needed anymore, changing the gender division of labour and questioning the future role of women in the rice value chain. In response, the project planned to progressively propose to women other labour options, for example weeding. In addition, new income alternatives outside rice farming were explored, such as brick making in factories, producing crafts, collecting strawberries or peas, and livestock rearing.

Gender Mainstreaming Approaches in the area of domestic water supply, sanitation and hygiene

A water supply, sanitation & hygiene (WASH) project in the **rural areas of Amhara Region, Ethiopia** has introduced **WASH specific capacity building activities for couples** with the objective to enhance active and meaningful participation of the community, and in particular of women in WASH related activities. Capacity building elements included training sessions, an experience sharing visit to a gender sensitive community and monthly community discussions. As a result, changes of attitude and behaviour among the couples were observed, which went beyond pure WASH related aspects, including reduction of domestic violence among the participating couples. Besides, the trained couples acted as promoters of good WASH practices. This piloted approach of capacity building of couples can bring significant changes in ensuring gender equality and in sustaining promoted WASH approaches in rural areas.

Monitoring and Evaluation of Gender in Water Interventions

Monitoring and evaluation of gender in water interventions assess whether gender issues are adequately addressed and whether implementation is considering gender dimensions as planned. Measuring change in terms of gender is often challenging and the combination of quantitative and qualitative assessments is strongly recommended.

The following approaches to gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation are proposed:

- Participatory monitoring (e.g. focus group discussions and interviews). Both men and women are involved, not only as informants but also as actors of the process.
- External monitoring or evaluation
- Impact evaluation
- Gender audit

To capture and measure gender-related changes throughout the intervention, gender-sensitive indicators are developed according to two main principles:

1) Design and select indicators through a participatory approach

This is important to understand what constitutes meaningful change for the people affected. For example, project beneficiaries may want to measure changes in women's education and employment; others may want to see changes in attitudes on domestic violence.

2) Combine quantitative and qualitative indicators

While quantitative indicators show what has changed, qualitative indicators show the quality of change and help to determine why certain patterns have emerged.

- Quantitative indicators record numbers and percentages of women and men who benefit from interventions. They draw on sex-disaggregated data systems put in place during the planning process. For example, women will represent at least one third of water committee members by the end of the project.
- Qualitative indicators record perceptions and experiences. In the above example, it is not sufficient to demonstrate that one third of water committee members are women, the quality and impact of their participation in committee meetings is as much important.

When establishing programme and project-specific monitoring and indicator system take into consideration indicator system for the global goals, including SDG 5 on gender equality and SDG 6 on water and sanitation. → UN custodian agencies for SDG 5 and 6 and targets and indicators set by the respective country where the programme/project is implemented.

It must be noted that despite a rigorous and participatory M&E process, it can still be difficult to determine why particular gender changes have happened. Actions to empower women and transform gender relations are complex processes where multiple factors are usually involved. In addition progress is non-linear and can take a long time. That is why impact on gender may not easily be attributed to a particular intervention.

To address such M&E challenges, adaptive learning is recommended throughout the process so that lessons are drawn and fed back into the project cycle to ensure regular and incremental improvement. It is also advised that M&E is placed in the broader context of the theory of change to enhance understanding and planification of activities towards the achievement of longer term goals.

Gender-related references and tools

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