

Brief on Gender in Water Resources Management

In the framework of the
Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)
labelled project 'Governance & Financing
for the Mediterranean Water Sector'

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Labelled in 2012 by the **UfM**, the project on overcoming governance challenges to financing the **Mediterranean Water Sector** is a joint undertaking of the **Global Water Partnership-Mediterranean (GWP-Med)** and the **Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)**.



1. WHAT is GENDER EQUALITY?

Gender equality is a human right and a prerequisite for poverty reduction and sustainable development. Gender equality is achieved when women and men, girls and boys, have equal rights, conditions, opportunities and power to shape their own lives and affect society (Sida, 2013).

2. WHY take GENDER into account in Water Resource Management?

One can argue that gender equality in water resource management is important from at least two perspectives – EFFICIENCY and HUMAN RIGHTS.

THE EFFICIENCY PERSPECTIVE

Women, men, girls and boys as water users

Increasing access to clean water and sanitation for women, men, girls and boys can have diverse impact on aspects such as:

- Decrease sickness rates related to water borne diseases, which has both direct and indirect costs (primary and hospital costs, death, loss of income generating possibilities for especially women taking care of sick family members).

Diarrhoeal disease alone amounts to an estimated 3.6 % of the total global burden of disease and is responsible for the deaths of 1.5 million people every year (estimate from 2012). In 2014 it was estimated that 58% of the total health burden, or 842 000 deaths per year, is attributable to unsafe water supply, sanitation and hygiene and includes 361 000 deaths of children under age five, mostly in developing countries (WHO 2014).

- Decrease time to fetch and manage clean water can lead to savings for society as a whole.

Forty billion work hours are lost in Africa each year to the need to carry water. In India, water-borne diseases are estimated to cost an annual \$600 million in lost production and medical treatment (Unicef 2004).

A water supply project in Morocco - increased overall rural primary school attendance (for both girls and boys) by 16% over four years. Because the water improvements reduced the time girls spent carrying water, it also helped to close the education gap between girls and boys and girls' attendance rates increased by 21% over the same period (World Bank, 2003).

Women and men as water customers

One challenge for organisations (public or private) providing clean water and sanitation is poor cost-recovery due to lack of payments from private household customers (as well as public institutions). By reaching out to women in particular, payment rates can increase!

Philippines communal irrigation development project - exceeded physical development targets and appraisal estimates of irrigation intensity and paddy yields. The project's success has been attributed to the full participation of the intended beneficiaries. The project partly draws on a tradition of farmer-built irrigation systems and responds to a cultural context in which women exercise independent land rights in the community by: Recruiting community organisers, two-thirds of whom were women; Ensuring membership of both spouses in water user associations; Actively encouraging women to assume leadership roles. It was noted that women's membership facilitated the payment of fees, because women controlled family finances (WB 1994).

Women and men as water managers

Women are often underrepresented in management public as well as private, and this is also the case for water resource management.

- Companies with a higher share of women at top levels deliver strong organisational and financial performance (McKinsey 2007).
- The Catalyst Corporation found that 'the group of companies with the highest representation of women on their top management teams experienced better financial performance than the group of companies with the lowest women's representation'. The investigation was made in 2007 with over 30,000 companies. Moreover, this finding holds for two key financial measures: return on equity was 35.1% higher and the total return to stakeholders was 34% higher. Companies with more women on their boards were found to outperform their rivals with a 42% higher return in sales, 66% higher return on invested capital and 53% higher return on equity (Catalyst 2007 and 2010).
- Diversity among employees and board members boosts creativity and innovation by adding complementary knowledge, skills and experience. A more diverse board of directors contributes to better performance because decisions are based on evaluating more alternatives compared to homogenous boards.
- Strong board diversity is shown to lead to more objective and active boards, greater participation in decision-making and stronger management oversight (Adams and Ferreira 2012).

Malawi: The United Nations has supported water infrastructure projects in Malawi since 1981. In 1988, an assessment showed that these projects had failed largely because women were excluded from decision-making and their knowledge went unused. As a result, program administrators—under pressure from the UN—recruited women. Including women's knowledge produced significant gains in the quality of water infrastructure (Tenthani, 2002).

THE HUMAN RIGHTS PERSPECTIVE

It is a rights issue to be included, heard and not discriminated against in decision-making!

International legal and political commitments that reiterate equality in access to water resources:

- Recognition of the importance of involving both women and men in the management of water and sanitation [1977 *United Nations Water Conference, Mar del Plata*; 1981-90 *the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade*];
- Call for including women's access to decision-making [*Convention of the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, article 1, 2, 3, 4 and 7*];
- Gender mainstreaming as a prerequisite for sustainable water management [1992, *International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin*];
- Call for women's participation and involvement in water-related development efforts [*Agenda 21 (paragraph 18.70f), and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (paragraph 25); 2005-2015 the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Life'*];
- Highlight the close inter-linkages between gender equality and women's empowerment [2015 *Sustainable Development Goals -SDGs*];
- Access to clean water and sanitation as a human right [2010 *Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly*];
- The importance of empowering rural women as critical agents [2012 *Rio +20 Outcome Document*].
- Most countries have Gender Equality legislation.
- Many countries have national policies and strategies requiring gender equality, such as access to consultations, to decision-making and to work opportunities.

3. HOW to mainstream GENDER in water resource management?

- National strategies articulated within national water resource management policies and strategies at all levels must take women, men, boys and girls different needs into account, including them in consultations is crucial as a first step.
- Support improved data management including sex-differentiated statistics and a more coherent monitoring at national (and global) levels that allows tracking the equity of services.
- Increase payments for services for cost-recovery and maintenance, by carrying out affordability and willingness to pay for water from a gender perspective, communication and outreach targeting in particular women (who tend to have less information leading to less motivation).
- Promote women access to decision-making positions in water management for improved efficiency at organisational level (public and private).
- Promote the use of gender checklists for e.g. analysis, planning, consultations, conferences, recruitment, promotion, communication outreach, monitoring and evaluations.