Women Participation in Community Water Management Projects in Buhera, Ward 13, Zimbabwe

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REVIEW ARTICLE

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Zimbabwe ABSTRACT

Despite women's role in the water sector as the main users and managers of water resource, they continue to be excluded from the related decision making and planning process. Participation of women in water resource management is currently envisaged as necessary for achieving sustainable management of water resources. The widespread trend to decentralize water resource management responsibility from the state to communities or local use groups has by and large ignored the implications of gender relations for the effectiveness and equity of natural resources management. Despite the rhetoric on women participation, evidence shows that women participation in water resource management is minimal. This is due to the fact that the criterion being used for participation is andocentric. Moreover, the costs and benefits of participation are often negative for women because complying with the rules and practices involves considerable time, costs and social risks. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. The study revealed the convoluted nature of women participation in water management projects. Various water management institutions in the study area have failed to stimulate women participation as they have failed to address women's strategic needs namely secure potable water, employment and access to water for agricultural purposes. The study revealed that the creation of effective accountability relationships among stakeholders is a prerequisite to the revitalization of women participation in water resource management projects. In order to ensure fair and effective water governance, it is vital to incorporate gender dimension in policies, projects and programs related to the management. Such a holistic approach to water governance can lead to greater efficiency of policies and programs, more equitable access and management of water resources, economic development and environmental sustainability.

Keywords: Women Participation, Decentralization, Livelihoods, Sustainable Development, Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Zimbabwe.

INTRODUCTION BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Women participation in water resources management is one of the recognized and adopted practices in water resources management. The Zimbabwean government sought to decentralize the management of water to the local community level through the establishment of local water management institutions namely the Catchment Water Management Authorities. The Water Act (1982) stipulates that the discriminatory practices and laws of the colonial regimes prevented equal access to water and utilization of water resources, with devastating consequences for sustainable development. The management practice of the past decades has militated against economic development, poverty alleviation, and food security.

In the quest for economic growth, the Zimbabwean government has been grappling with the challenge of ensuring that the principles of sustainable development are adhered to and the benefits generated from the utilization of water resources are channeled to the poor, especially women, in order to achieve the set Millennium Development Goals (Agarwa, 1999). Poor access to portable water for household use and water for agricultural purposes has affected women's living standard in the study area. The deterioration in water quality poses a serious threat to the sustainability of women livelihoods. Furthermore, over the past decade, water has been unevenly distributed at the local level and variability has been both temporal and spatial. In the process, women have been the worst affected by changes in water availability and quality. The intricate relationship between the management of water resources and feminization of poverty has become increasingly clearer in the study area over the last two decades.

LITERATURE REVIEW

WATER AND DEVELOPMENT: A GROWING CRISIS

There is widespread recognition that the world is facing growing water crisis, affecting the wellbeing of millions of the poorest people, especially women (Biswas and others, 1993). Rapidly growing populations, agricultural intensification and climate change all contribute to greater competition and scarcity of water resources. Despite massively increased provision of water facilities over the past few decades and the development of low cost, sustainable technical solutions to many aspects of water provision, millions still suffer from water-related diseases and the physical, social and economic burdens associated with scarcity (Green, 1994). A number of international initiatives aim to tackle this global problem through improving the governance of water and setting targets for provision of supplies to increased number of people within the general context of poverty alleviation and environmental sustainability. The greater involvement of women and the adoption of gender sensitive approaches are increasingly seen as integral to the achievement of sustainable development. Access to water additionally depends on legal rights, social relations, cultures and customs, rights to land, control of resources and access to appropriate regulatory institutions (Government of Uganda, 1998). The realization has led to an increased focus on the governance of water supplies, and particularly on community based approaches for their management. Gender concerns are assumed to be automatically incorporated within participatory community based approaches.

The past few decades have seen a changing emphasis on the role of women and gender relations in water (Bruce, and Shrubsole, 1994). Early policies and interventions adopted a welfare approach, seeing women as the primary recipients and beneficiaries of improved water supplies. At the Second World Water Forum in The Hague, 2000, it was recognized that in addition to being prime users of domestic water, women use water in their key role of food production and that women are most vulnerable to water related disasters. The forum concluded that women's involvement would improve governance (Government of Uganda, 2000). Since women bear the brunt of the burden of poor management, they could be empowered through greater and more effective participation.

At the International Conference on Freshwater in Bonn in 2001, the policy statement emphasized the need for a gendered approach involving both men and women, while also suggesting that in order to achieve this, women's roles in water related areas needed strengthening (Koppen and Barbara, 1996). Further emphasis on equality was given in the statement of the world water forum in Kyoto in 2003. In the quest for safe, clean water for all, many governments face a crisis of governance and need an integrated water resources management approach with transparent and participatory approaches that address ecological and human needs. The Ministerial Declaration stated that 'in managing water we should ensure good governance with strong focus on household and neighborhood community based approaches addressing equity in sharing benefits, with due regard to pro-poor and gender perspectives in water policies (Fernando, 1996).

Other international meetings and policy statements, concerned with a broad spectrum of goals from poverty eradication to environmental sustainability, have been concerned with both water and gender equality. The Millennium Development Goals adopted at the Millennium Summit at the United Nations in New York in 2000 included goals to 'promote gender equality and empower women' and to 'ensure environmental sustainability' (Olfat, 1998). At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg (2002) commitments were made to promote women empowerment and emancipation and incorporating gender equality in all the activities specified in Agenda 21, the Millennium Development Goals and the Plan of Implementation of the Summit (Pearson, 2000). A study of water and sanitation in 88 countries revealed a strong relationship between women participants and sustainable development (Schiller, 1992). Projects designed to run with the full participation of women are more sustainable and effective that those that do not. These support earlier studies done by the World Bank, which also reveal that women participation was strongly associated with effectiveness of water projects (Rachel, and others, 1996).

It has become apparently accepted that women should play an important role in water management and that this role could be enhanced through the strategy of gender mainstreaming (Soedjarwo, 1985).

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Gender mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programs, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy of making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programs in all spheres so that women and men benefit equally. In water management, gender mainstreaming is justified for reasons of efficiency and effectiveness; a gender-sensitive approach helps ensure that supplies are provided and managed more sustainably. It is also argued that gender mainstreaming helps to empower women and so furthers broader goals of equality within society, contributing to poverty alleviation and social inclusion (Rachel and others, 1996).

IMPORTANCE OF GENDER PERSPECTIVES IN WATER RESOURSES GORVERNANCE

Although many policy statements still focus on women as disadvantaged, others argue that it is ineffective to focus on women in isolation from their broader social relationships (Rosegrant, 1997). A concern for women has been expanded into a gender focus that looks at the relations between men and women and how these shape access to resources, participation in decision making and the exercise of power within households and communities. If women are disadvantaged in their relations with men, then changing this situation requires changes in the views and actions of men as well as women. Gender analysis sees relations between men and women not as biologically determined differences of sex but as socially shaped differences of roles and expectations that are culturally specific but can shift and change over time. Gender approaches to development are therefore underpinned by the notion that it is possible to promote changes in gender relations, in favor of more equitable divisions of labor and of power between women and men, and that it is possible to design interventions to facilitate this process (Adelman, 1997). A gender approach to water resources management, for example thrive for balanced division between men and women in the following areas: access to information; physical work; contributions in time and cash; decision making; and access to and control of resources and benefits. Such an approach would take into account:

- The differences between women's and men's interests even within the same household, how these overlap or conflict and how they are negotiated;
- The differences among women and men based on age, wealth, ethnicity and other factors;
- The way gender roles and relations change as a result of social, economic and technological trends.

Due to the gendered divisions of labor, women and men may have different knowledge about natural resources, and indeed different concerns about the quality and quantity of water available. Building these different interests into the design and management of supply systems is likely to ensure more effective and inclusive use, and thus greater benefits (Koppen and Barbara, 1996). For example, women as primary fetchers of domestic water suffer disproportionately from the breakdown of facilities, scarcity of water and therefore may make the most reliable caretakers and maintenance technicians.

However, due to prevailing gender relations in the particular socio-economic contexts, women may also face difficulties in exercising such roles effectively due to restricted mobility, funds and lack of time. A gender-sensitive approach would identify these constraints and take measures to overcome them.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN WATER RESOURCES GOVERNANCE

The fundamental question which should be addressed is how an awareness of the complexities of issues around gender and water can be translated into practical actions with tangible results for both efficiency and gender equality. Gender mainstreaming strategies require changes in institutions to facilitate incorporating gender sensitivity at all levels and in all activities (Soedjarwo, 1985). Putting commitments into practice in the water sector is important. Although there is growing recognition of the importance of social components of interventions, technical and economic aspects continue to dominate and are often perceived quicker and simpler to implement. It cannot be taken for granted that the existence of a gender equality policy is sufficient to ensure women's full participation in water programs, or that gender considerations are always taken into account (Adelman, 1975). There is a significant gap between policy definition and implementation, linked to the fact that gender analysis is still not a systematic and integral part of the majority of water interventions. In many cases gender policy documents tend to be vague and consist of catch all phrases that offer little concrete guidance at the implementation stage (Athukorale, 1996). This may be exacerbated by gender specialists whose advice is couched in general terms rather than concrete guidance for action. Phrases such as 'a gender perspective should be adopted' or 'all gender – related issues should be specified' leave stakeholders at a loss as to what this actually means and how it can be put into practice. This is made worse by project documentation that continues to talk in genderneutral terms referring to the 'community', the 'users' and the 'consumers', rather than referring to people in more socially specific terms, such as 'poor women', 'wealth women' or 'local male leaders'. The use of gender neutral terms has underestimated the urgency of incorporating gender sensitive policies in water resource management. Mechanisms are needed to facilitate the dissemination and implementation of a gender policy throughout relevant organizations at the central level (Alina, 1985). These include policy statements and budgetary commitments, procedure relating to institutional learning, responsibility and accountability, planning and evaluation methodologies, personnel policy and training and data collection. Additionally, evidence suggests that these initiatives work best within a legal framework that specifically recognizes human rights and where there are strong agencies advocating for the uptake of these rights. An important instrument is the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

EMPOWERMENT AND EQUALITY IN WATER RESOURCES GOVERNANCE

According to Agarwal (1999) the empowerment of women is necessary to ensure gender and social equality and would enable women to take control of their own lives, to challenge the oppressive aspects of social systems individually and collectively and to enter into relations with men on the basis of equality.

These broad and ambitious goals are related to the more instrumental aims of ensuring efficient water management. The impacts of improved water supplies can be translated into tangible benefits for women; better health, time freed up for other activities and more productive potential. All these outcomes can provide the basis for greater equality in their everyday lives. Moreover, a greater say and improved skills in decision-making and in managing resources may strengthen women's ability to contribute to the transformation of societal inequalities. Without specific attention to gender perspectives, projects may reinforce inequalities and differences between men and women even when there is an explicit focus on women's participation. For example, early initiatives emphasizing women's roles as the bearers of water and the managers of household water may have served to reinforce gender inequitable divisions of domestic labor. To further the goal of equality, gender sensitivity should be combined with wider social analysis, and an appreciation of other power dimensions in communities. A gender sensitive approach helps to overcome some limitations of participatory approaches in development interventions. Experience suggest that participatory approaches are not necessary either gender or power sensitive; local participation may be dominated by elders, wealth people and men. Indeed women may feel inhibited from participating because of their workload, cultural norms that makes it difficult for them to travel to or speak in meetings, and relations of respect and difference to elders and men. However there is evidence that where participatory approaches are combined with gender sensitivity, for example in identifying appropriate spaces and forms of articulation to facilitate women's involvement, some of these barriers to inclusion can be overcome.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

A mixed methods, multiple – stage approach was used to obtain data. The four months study, consisted of a preliminary phase, survey method and follow up stage that included a workshop to obtain stakeholder feedback. The approach was used to obtain both qualitative and guantitative data. Topic guides were used for semi-structured interviews with key informants, and the questionnaires included general questions with probes. More formal questionnaires for individual irrigation plot holders, Agricultural Extension Officers and non-governmental organizations were then developed based on information obtained from other questionnaires used in similar research, and from document analysis. The research also considered the Third system Project, a bottom- up approach to development put forward by the International foundation for Development Alternatives (IFDA) in 1976 as the principal for values of participatory development today because it is based on a system of people's power, voluntary organization, consciousness raising and local action. Validity of the survey was guaranteed by examining the instruments of data collection, pilot testing of the instruments, and assuring anonymity of respondents. The research used local languages and indigenous categories to ensure common understanding among respondents. The findings were discussed with participants at the end of the study for further validation.

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were entered and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The results were presented mainly using descriptive analysis.

THE STUDY AREA

The water situation in Buhera is highly problematic. Approximately 56% of the area's population (530 000) will be subject to water scarcity by 2025(Pearson, 2000). A number of factors account for this. Firstly, climate variability is causing drought, desertification and other natural disasters. Rainfall - the major source of water varies from one part of the area to the other. Water bodies such as rivers, lakes, and marshes, that support life for both humans and wildlife, are degrading. Other sources of water such as wells are under threat of desertification and are depleted, thus accelerating the migration of farmers into marginal lands. Secondly, land clearing for agriculture, encroachment of poor people into the forest and subsequent felling of trees pose a threat to the water retaining capacity of forest which lead to the reduction of available water. Furthermore, siltation by soil erosion continues to shorten the life span of reservoirs. A fundamental feature of Buhera's water problems is its link to poverty. Green, (1994) observes that while poverty has a tremendous impact on water resources, water when managed poorly, hurts the poor most. Buhera faces a crisis of endemic poverty exacerbated by slow economic growth and high levels of indebtedness. Since the Structural Adjustment Programs in the early 1990's, economic performance has been poor and worsening, affecting mainly the agricultural sector. This paper therefore contends that water is a valuable but vulnerable natural asset. When properly managed it can be an instrument for poverty alleviation, economic recovery and economic growth but when poorly managed water can rather serve as a limiting factor in poverty alleviation, resulting in poor health and low productivity, food insecurity, and constrained economic development.

AIM AND OBJECTIVES

Aim

To assess the role of women as important actors in an integrated management approach for a sustainable water use in Buhera

Specific Objectives

The following specific objectives guide discussion in this study: explore the use of a participatory approach in community water resource management in Buhera; analyze the potential women dispose and the contribution they can make in water resource management process; examine some of the constraints and challenges faced by women in their quest to participate in water resource management; and recommend various strategies through which effective participation of women could be facilitated in a community water management process.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Age-sex

Participants were drawn from both sexes but females comprised the majority compared to their male counterparts (63% as compared to 37%). the sampling of male participants assisted in increasing the margin of reliability and objectivity of the research findings. The ages of participants ranged slightly below 25 years to 65 years. Data was collected from participants who are economically active and no respondent was in the retirement age group or a minor. The slightly below 25-35 years age group was the largest that constituted 35 % and the 36-45 years age group was the second largest constituting 29%. The 46-55 years age group constituted 22% and those between the 55-65 years age group constituted 14% of the total respondents. Table 1 shows the age-sex composition of respondents.

Age Group	Males	Females
Below 25-35 years	15	21
36-45	11	17
46-55	5	18
56-65	6	7
Total	37	63

Table 1. Age-sex Composition of respondents.

Academic Qualification of Respondents

Participants were drawn from varying educational background. It included those who had no formal education, those with elementary education, to holders of tertiary education. Generally the research showed that a number of respondents had acquired formal education, as 94 % of them had acquired either vocational training after primary education or Zimbabwe junior certificate level of education; 49% had attained ordinary level. Only a few had no formal education (14%) which shows that the majority of respondents could read and write. However, the research noted that women were the worst affected in terms of academic achievement. The research noted that patriarchy has influenced women's educational achievement. Under such conditions empowerment of women has remained imperceptible.

Marital Status of Respondents

The group comprised of people of all marital status since the single, married, widowed and divorced were included in the sample. The majority of respondents were married and they constituted 48%, and of this, 32% were females. The single also constituted a significant figure as they constituted 40% of almost equal males and females, (21% and 19% respectively). The widows were the minority as they constituted a combined 12% equally divided between the two groups.

THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT IN BUHERA

The research revealed that women in Buhera have the primary responsibility for management of household water supply, sanitation and health.

Water is necessary not only for drinking, but also for food production and preparations, care of domestic animals, personal hygiene, care of the sick, cleaning, washing and waste disposal. Due to their dependence on water resources, women have accumulated considerable knowledge about water resources, including location, quality and storage methods. However, the effort geared towards improving the management of finite water resources and extending access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation has often overlooked the central role of women in water resources management (Fernando, 19996).

The implementation of the Water policy guidelines in Buhera was initiated on an experimental basis. The results proved so encouraging that in 1985 the state government declared a policy on Participatory Water Management (PWM), along the lines of the national policy, emphasizing women participation in the planning, implementation and management of water projects, and seeking the co-operation of voluntary organizations. Participatory Water Management refers to programs that seek to increase participants' direct involvement in water system management either as a substitute or complement for the state role. This generally leads to some form of joint management or co-management of water systems with the state responsible for more tasks at higher levels of the system and organizations responsible for tasks at lower levels. Participatory Water Management involved the creation of people's institutions to operate and manage water facilities. This usually involves a Canal Water Society (CWS) comprising willing and interested beneficiaries from the entire command area which could range from one village to a number of villages. Two-three persons from each minor (offshoots of the main) canal are elected to form part of the committee that takes responsibility for water distribution and management and the daily upkeep and maintenance of the system. The committee is wholly responsible for water distribution and its management, ensuring that even villages at the tail end receive water. It frames the rules for water consumption, ensures the smooth and efficient delivery of water and the recovery of dues from each farmer according to the number of units of water consumed. Disputes are resolved at monthly committee meetings; all decisions are communicated to the larger CWS at its monthly meeting. The CWS appoints three persons, who draw a token honorarium, to look after the water distribution and management. At times CWS appoint an institutional organizer who is responsible for overseeing the distribution and management of the entire canal system, and for providing technical inputs to the society. A water operator opens and shuts the gates of the canal, while the secretary keeps accounts. If it is a registered society, the secretary has to make sure the accounts are annually audited. S/he is responsible for managing water charges. Participatory Water Management has been initiated with support from CARE International (Zimbabwe), a non-communal, non-profit rural development organization with a focus on natural resource management. The core concern of CARE is organizing communities and building their capacity to manage their resources. The organization encourages the participation of women in its programs. When CARE first undertook the Participatory Water Management projects on a pilot basis, not much attention was paid to the involvement of women in managing water.

This was chiefly because the role played by women in water and the productive use of water is invisible. However, growing awareness within the organization led to conscious efforts to involve women in the canal irrigation management societies and to change the perception that women could not handle matters of water, or were not concerned with it.

During the initial stages of the project women were involved as nominal members only; only landowners were made regular members. As nominal members, they had no say in the decision-making. Slowly, however, following the organization's proactive efforts at involving women in water management committees, people began to be convinced that involving women would bring about overall development within the village community. In fact, their involvement started to become visible in every aspect of Participatory Water Management, whether it be motivating farmers groups, overseeing canal construction, repair and maintenance, committee decision-making, framing the rules for water distribution, setting the terms for irrigation, water distribution and administration, and liaising with government agencies.

As a result of their involvement, the lives of women in Buherahave undergone a complete transformation. They are much more confident and have taken control of their lives, those of their families and also that of the community. Other notable changes are an increase in their knowledge base and increased mobility. Where earlier they did not venture outside the village, they now walk into any government office, interacting with government officials. Their tolerance of injustice has been considerably lowered, as is evident in their personal lives. However, it's not as though the women's involvement has been accepted without protest. Apart from their personal struggles, the women face opposition from farmers and the community. Construction work being supervised by women is often stalled or destroyed. Women have faced challenges in the financing of water initiatives. Furthermore involvement of women in water management initiatives has meant an increased workload for the women are involved in water distribution, and the work of the committee is completed in a calm and efficient manner.

The study showed that unless gender sensitivity is combined with social analysis, community management of water supplies is not automatically inclusive and equality enhancing. There was recognition that women should play an increased role in water management, and a requirement that water management committees should primarily consist of women (Adelman, 1997). However poor women are finding it hard to be elected to influential positions. When asked about the criteria used to elect people to positions of responsibility villagers repeatedly mentioned that they elect someone they could respect and one with resources such as a bicycle or cash(so they could represent their villages at district headquarters when required). The criteria used results in poor women least likely to participate in the collective decision –making process.

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CONSTRAINTS TO WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

Women in Buhera like many other social groups face some distinctive structural impediments to their improved social and economic well-being and in their efforts to provide adequate water supplies. These include amongst others an unequally distribution of resources and assets, skewed power relations, and a frequent dependence on men or elite groups even though these elites may be responsible for the continuing oppression of women. In Buhera where poverty is particularly severe, land and water resources have become increasingly concentrated in the hands of the local authorities, elderly, thereby depriving the women of any real opportunity to manage it. Soedjarwo(1985); Shrbsole and Bruce (1989); and Olfat (1985) contend that broadly based rural development is impossible in most countries without fundamental agrarian reforms, gender equity and land redistribution.

From the political point of view, there is a lack of the political will to fully incorporate women in decision making process. It is clear that women by the force of their number and their potentiality constitute a threat to Buhera local Authority and other elite groups. There is the general feeling of mutual suspicion and mistrust characterizing relations between popular movements like women groups and the state. Brohman (1996 258) argues that women movements have tended to view the state as an adversary, dominated by elite groups aligned against the interest of the majority. The local authorities still fear that grassroots women organizations will generate popular women empowerment beyond its control. Consequently, Moser (1989:117) notes development project whose objectives include capacity building, effectiveness, and cost sharing, but which in practice also result in empowerment, tend to be introduced for specific political reasons linked to social and economic transformations at the national level, and to last only as long as those reasons are valid. It is contended here that the responsibility of women group formation for instance women water catchment unions has been placed within conventional bureaucratic control, therefore making the problems of women solved through the intervention of the state, non-governmental organizations or men. This approach is limited because it perceives women as passive objects upon which interventions must act, rather than as active subjects participating in the shaping of their lives and communities. It tends to be based on a range of negative assumptions about women that they are, at best, unable to take care of themselves and, at worst, responsible for the underdevelopment of their areas. This does not however underscore the fact that women themselves are responsible for some of the economic or social problems that affect them.

More so, the HIV/Aids pandemic estimated at 1,500 carries in the study area (CIA 1999) is having a devastating effect on the efforts of women to be involved in the water management domain. Segreldin, (1995) estimates that more than half of the HIV infected population worldwide fall within the economically active age group and women are particularly vulnerable. The spread of HIV/Aids has been worsened by the literacy levels which are very low. Access to knowledge, information and skill, and vocational training, (the main drivers of sustainable development) is another area in which women in Buhera have pressing difficulties in fully participating in water management.

Furthermore, the research noted that women have a disproportionate burden of unemployment, with young women, schools leavers and dropouts being particularly vulnerable. Despite the fact that women comprise about 52 per cent of the population in Buhera, they make up averagely only 5 percent of influential posts in water management. Thus, the strongest demand expressed today by women in Buhera is that of participation. Women desire to be serious and reliable partners in the conception, planning and implementation of water policies and programs in their communities and societies.

The research revealed that much of the progress that has been made in Buhera is in the area perceived by planners as more naturally associated with women, including domestic water supply and sanitation. Attempts to extend women's roles in the areas of irrigation and water and sanitation face other difficulties, including broader issues of land and access rights. Women's involvement in water related issues is also limited as this is a field of expertise that continues to be dominated by men. Furthermore, there continues to be tension in policy approaches between efficiency and equality concerns. The predominant concern continues to be the sustainable achievement of efficient distribution of water rather than empowerment, equality or broader societal changes.

LESSONS LEARNED AND ISSUES FOR PROMOTING WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN WATER RESOURCE PROJECTS

Women Empowerment

In the Commonwealth's, 1998, view empowerment takes place when women are provided with choices in life, are able to make clued-up decisions and take responsible action based on their decisions. Pursuing the objective of women empowerment gives them the maximum opportunity to contribute to the economic, social and cultural advancement of their families and communities and achieves elf-fulfillment. Effective and meaningful participation in decision-making is fundamental to any kind of women empowerment.

Facilitating women empowerment means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which women can contribute on their own behalf, and on their own terms rather than at the direction of men in a community water process. These enabling conditions should include; political will, adequate resource allocation, a supportive, legal and administrative framework; access to knowledge, information and skills, and a positive value system. The empowerment of women in a water resource process should be the business of the communities as a whole and involves the concerted efforts of key community stakeholders, Buhera local authorities, water systems support agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs),family, kinship and community water networks, women groups and, above all, women themselves. Considering the current state of affairs in Buhera, the way ahead is to have a serious look at how the present forms of participation could be developed, what kind of organization (women development committee, traditional authority) is best in charge of the management of the water supply system, how to increase decision making on the type of organization, how it chooses its members, their responsibilities, how to strengthen the rules and regulations governing the use of the water system and the access to the economic resources to increase women influence in the community.

Enactment of water rules and regulations

The key to effective water policy reform in Buhera is the enactment of enforceable legislation that establishes the rights and obligations of all stakeholders. Good laws and policies can create an enabling environment that facilitates or at least does not impede women participation. Although individuals, groups, and agencies play key roles in initiating a process of "bottom-up" development, change can be facilitated if rules and regulations at both the national level and project level provide the freedom and incentives for women to participate in the design and implementation of community water projects. The World Bank (1995) identifies three main sorts of legal issues that contribute to participation in projects: (a) the right to information, (b) the right to organize and enter into contractual agreements, and (c) the impact of the borrower's financial and other regulations on communities. Participation process that does not satisfy the above prerequisites is more rhetoric than reality.

There is something inherent in the political culture which doubts everything which is not originated by men. Local community management authority in Buhera is a victim of similar attitudes. Even where the legal frameworks are supportive of women empowerment, discrimination still exists in the values and attitudes of the local authority, dominated by men, who still see women as a problem that needs to be solved. Women empowerment shifts this premise to one which women are seen as an asset rather than a liability in a water resource management process

Right to Information

Given the political nature of integration, the first challenge to enabling Integrated Water Resources Management is to cultivate the political critical mass in favor of it and women are a vital target. Participation is a function of information through which people come to share a development vision, make choices, and manage activities. Illustrating this, Harnmeijer (1993) relates the case of some small-scale water supply projects that have failed because they started without adequate information bases concerning the needs, preferences, and level of commitment of the community. To achieve this, information must flow from governments and water support institutions to the communities in ways that genuinely support people's informed participation.

Women should have access to adequate information on water system management in a timely and meaningful manner. Information about the water system should be disseminated through education and sensitizations by organizing seminars, workshops and training sessions. It may also be done by outreach community visitations by members of the water management committee. Furthermore, information can flow vigorously through local communication systems. This includes traditional entertainment such as songs, dance, and community theatre, at traditional gathering places, such as village markets, and religious meeting places.

Local water management boards or committees

The study revealed that during the project preparatory phase, water committees were formed in the villages to collect contributions and to assign responsibility for looking after taps and water sources. Although such boards had the responsibility for the administration, operation, maintenance, expansion and improvement of the water system, it was not done in the light of community customs and respects especially the agricultural commitments of women in the community.

Economic Empowerment

The study noted that community water systems require some financial contribution from the community themselves for the maintenance of the system especially after donor support has ended. In order for women to be part of this process, they require economic enfranchisement, and ready and equitable access to resources that provide the solid material base for their action. While opportunities for waged employment are not always available in Buhera, community laws should favor access of women to land, productive activities, micro-credit schemes that provide potential for self-employment through entrepreneurial activities, access to small farming loans, training and advisory services.

The creation of necessary conditions for economic empowerment requires a reasonable distribution of resources within the community and families allowing women to have their own income to contribute to the system (Biswas and others, 1993). However, this suggestion may seem difficult to implement especially in the Buhera setting where family and kinship relationship has often considered the man as the owner of vital productive resources. The research suggests that such limitations to women access to economic resource should be removed if women have to effectively participate in a community water resource scheme.

Lack of transparency in Buhera has led to opportunistic behavior, favoring some water management committees, central bureaucratic government and financial institutions. A solution to this will be devolving responsibility to water users themselves. Community management is a powerful mechanism for developing IWRM. Local forms of water organization should operate under greater autonomy in decision-making, have sustainable strategies for cost recovery, clear standards for assessing performance and be publicly accountable through regulations. For this to occur, women must be properly represented.

Women Capacity building in water resource management

Water supply schemes in Buhera experience severe constraints due to shortage of professional and technical personnel. However, the major constraint is the insufficiency of funds, slowdown and interruption of flow.

Enabling women in such schemes to use water-wise knowledge well will require programs of training, capacity building and human resource development especially in areas such as accounting and budgetary and management performance should be strengthened with supervisory and advisory services. However, to get maximum benefits, knowledge of and respect for community approaches must become an integral part of education and training schemes. In many cases, women worker are either recruited as volunteers or by some objective selection and undergo on-the-job training.

Women Groups and Associations

The freedom of women to associate and their internal organization is essential to effective participation here should be the design of effective mechanisms for group participation, an appropriate legal standing that enables them to interact effectively with other stakeholders as required (Adelman, 1975), and an equitable relationships among group members and transparent processes for internal decision making. There should be less complex or less time consuming processes available for formalizing women groups so that they can participate in community project-related activities. Such formalization must be necessary to receive public funds or enter into valid contracts. Furthermore, women possess traditional knowledge and skills concerning the sensing and locating of water and protection of water sources. Water sources on indigenous lands are often considered a sacred element, and indigenous women are valuable holders of 'water knowledge'. Women's traditional land management skills often provide the most effective method of water resource management in their settlement areas.

CONCLUSIONS

Women's role in the management of water resources has been increasingly acknowledged by development agencies, policymakers, national governments and non-governmental organizations over the past decade. Despite this recognition of the importance of involving women, evidence shows a wide gap between the stated intentions to improve their access to water and practical results in the field. In general, the problems are well known; there is a critical need to identify solutions at different levels in order to move the agenda of gender mainstreaming in water management forward.

Gender analysis in water resources management is site and project specific, and gendersensitive project cycles, beginning with design, are helpful in ensuring the practical and successful targeting of women beneficiaries in water projects. The research noted that affirmative action can be essential to ensuring women's participation in decision-making in water management. However, programs and projects that include supporting components such as capacity-development, access to capital and awareness-raising achieve better results in encouraging women's participation and improving their livelihoods. Moreover, multiple-use water systems tend to address women's concerns better than single use water systems.

One of the major findings of this review is that, although the problems and issues in women's participation in water management are well documented, there is insufficient information, apart from some anecdotal evidence, on successful efforts to involve women in water projects.

The achievements of programs and projects are usually described in terms of the number of women beneficiaries. There is a need to document the processes that lead to the successful participation of women in the water management initiatives and how this participation actually improves the livelihoods of women. It is also important to identify the constraints faced at various levels and how these constraints have been overcome to achieve the results. Moreover, analysis is needed on the impact of water projects on women's workloads. This impact needs to be clearly evaluated and reported because it is often difficult to find significant information on this issue in project documents and reports.

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