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MAINSTREAMING GENDER IN INTEGRATED WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: MAJOR ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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INTRODUCTION

The quest for development has led to a consensus that participation by both men and women –not as objects of development but as equal partners- is essential for sustained interventions. This has encouraged the promotion and use of gender sensitive approach in water and sanitation management and, more recently, in integrated water resources management (IWRM).

Forums such as the International Drinking Water Supplies and Sanitation Decade Review (1990), the Dublin Conference 1992, the World Summit on Sustainable Development 1992, 2002, the 2nd World Water Forum, The Hague 2000 and recently the 3rd World Water Forum, Kyoto, Japan, 2003 have endorsed these concepts.

Technically and politically it is well recognized the importance and the necessity of mainstreaming gender in integrated water resources management to promote both efficiency and equity goals.

In many countries, including those of the Mediterranean, several efforts have been invested in developing gender mainstreaming materials, tools, providing a lot of information.

However, a major challenge facing program officers, water and gender specialists is that such information and materials are anchored in different institutions, resource centers, websites and national, regional and international organizations.

Undoubtedly, without a proper guide as to where to find specific information aiding the user to existing materials and tools, it will be difficult to support the previous efforts as well as the on-going ones to those trying to mainstream gender in their projects and those seeking to improve their knowledge and skills in Gender and IWRM.

IWRM

IWRM is a cross – sectorial policy approach to respond to the growing demands in water in the context of finite water supplies. It is an approach that aims to ensure the coordinated development of water, land and related resources to optimize economic and social welfare without compromising the sustainability of environmental systems (GWP, 2000).

All governments made commitments to the women and gender quality goals in the Beijing platform for action (1995), and recognized gender mainstreaming. “The process of assessing and implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in any area and at all levels” (ECOSOC, 1997).

Community participation and management approaches have failed to address these issues largely because communities are often seen as a collection of people with a common purpose.

For this reason, gender usually is fundamentally about power, subordination and inequality, and gender mainstreaming is about changing these to secure equality in social manifestations for the disadvantages members of society.

A GENDER APPROACH IN IWRM

There are three elements in an approach to gender and IWRM. Each of these elements supports both project efficiency and a concern for gender equality:

- 1) every initiative, programmes and analysis should take steps to understand the differences and relations among and between women and men in each specific context (Gender Analysis). This should be done in a participatory fashion and both men and women should be involved;
- 2) all initiatives should incorporate women's and men's prospective, needs and interests to reduce gender inequalities;
- 3) participatory approach that facilitate the equitable participation of women and men, particularly at decision-making levels should be used.

The importance of involving women as well as men in water resources management is not only to improve women's situation, but, also essential element for effective development, utilization and management of water resources.

There is an increasing urgency in the need to mainstream a gender perspective at the overall water resources level because of the new emerging international perspectives on water resources.

However, it is not an easy task to mainstream a gender perspective into the framework of commonly accepted international principles relating to IWRM characterized with the following key points:

- water should be treated as an economic, social and environmental good;
- water policies should focus on the management of water and not just on the provision of water;
- governments should facilitate and enable the sustainable development of water resource including a regulatory framework;
- water resources should be managed at the lowest appropriate level; and
- there should be recognition that women play a centered role in the provision, management and safeguarding water.

What needs to be done is "unpack" each of the principles in terms of the socio cultural aspects including gender.

Equally, understanding the links between gender equality issues and water resources management to develop awareness, commitment and capacity for integrating gender perspectives into water resources management.

THE PROCESS OF GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN IWRM: HOW TO BEGIN?

The process can begin by doing the following:

Information

Disaggregate all relevant data and information by men and women, firstly to identify the different needs of men and women and, secondly, to study the differential impact of IWRM interventions on men and women. Gender analysis (an examination of women's and men's roles, resources, needs and priorities in relation to water) should be part of all situation analysis; planning and evaluation processes; and gender analytical studies should be commissioned to examine particular issued and address in formation gaps.

Consultation, Advocacy and Decision-Making

Involve men and women in planning and implementing IWRM interventions on the basis of their various skills and the contribution they can make rather than on the basis on what is considered as "appropriate" by gender. This means promoting the involvement of women as well as men in consultation and decision-making from the community level to the highest level of organizational management. This will require further efforts to be made to create space for women in planning and implementation processes and to facilitate their participation through capacity building.

These aforementioned steps are to be followed by other two steps:

Action to Promote Gender Sensitivity-Beneficiary Groups

This step should be based on context specific sex disaggregated data and gender analytical information (*step a*) and a clear understanding of women's and men's priorities (*step b*). Actions need to be explicitly included in policy and project and frameworks, backed up with staff and budgets, monitored and reviewed through appropriate indicator of change.

Action to Promote Gender Sensitivity-Organizations

This step is directed to develop the skills, knowledge and commitment of the staff involved in management and implementation as well as addressing and understanding issues of gender differences and inequality within developing organizations themselves.

Appropriate capacity building activities have to be explicitly included in policy, project documents and programs framework.

In the abovementioned four key-steps of gender mainstreaming it is important for policy makers to recognize, understand and take into account the following:

- that without specific consideration of the differences and inequalities between women and men, it is possible that several of the new policy trends could end up making women situation worse;
- that all data should be disaggregated by sex;
- that matching ability to pay and willing to pay may require redistribution of income of women;
- that not only water but also women's time is an economic good and that markets are likely to undervalue women's times, and
- that gender barriers of effective and equitable management of water resources are more likely to be overcome if women are organized into movements for change.

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT: BENEFITS (WORLD WATER VISION, 1999)

Gendered Water Resources Management will lead to greater:

- effectiveness: the infrastructure, as well as valuable water resources, will be more widely and optimally used and sustained by all user groups;
- efficiency: the presence of limited water resources the sector agency can reach more individuals;
- development: the service and its social process will not only bring water; it will increase consumption, production, income environmental security, health and overall family welfare;
- sustainable use in freshwater ecosystem : women's and men's direct and fair participation in research and project implementation can increase the potential flexibility and creativity in responding to environmental insecurity and changes in resource system;
- equity: burdens and benefits will be shared more equitably between women and men in the community at large as well as in the household.

USE OF A GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN IWRM: MAJOR REASONS

Conflicts over water-too much- too little or too polluted, harm people, food production and the environment.

Research and practical experience demonstrate that effective, efficient and equitable management of water resources is only achieved when both women and men are involved in consultation process and in management and implementation of water related services. Striking a gender balance ensure that:

- the roles and responsibilities of women and men are mobilized to best effect;
- the creativity energy and knowledge of both sexes contribute to making water schemes and eco-systems work better;
- the benefits and costs of water use accrue equitably to all groups.

A gender perspective in IWRM is necessary for a variety of reasons:

Increase Project Effectiveness and Meeting Project Results

There is a vast body of anecdotal research projects and running programmes around the world and, particularly, in the developing countries that evidently demonstrate that ensuring both women's and men's participation improves project performance. Involving both women and men enhance project results and improves the likelihood of sustainability (Naryan, 1995; Fong et al., 1996 and Quisuimbing, 1994).

There are several positive impacts of paying attention to gender issues in water resources management and irrigation project, among them the following:

- recruiting Community Organizers;
- promotion and ensuring membership of both women and men in water user; associations and thereby facilitating the payment of water fees;
- actively encouraging women to assure leadership roles.

Ensuring Environmental Sustainability

Although there is no guarantee that the inclusion of women as well as men as beneficiaries and active participants in irrigation initiatives will produce better environmental results, experience shows that the potential of sustainability grows with increased involvement of the affected parties.

There is a widespread interest in the commitment to a "new development paradigm that integrates environmental sustainability with gender equality and justice within and between generations.

The Beijing platform for action (1995) highlighted environmental issues as one of critical area of concern ("gender inequalities in the management and safeguarding of natural resources and in the safeguarding of the environment").

Improving Social and Economical Analysis

With a gender analysis, planners gain a more accurate picture of communities, natural resources uses, households and water users. Understanding the differences among and between women and men is a part of good analysis and contribute to more effective initiatives.

Using gender analysis involves:

- understanding the gender – differentiated systems for access to resource, labour water uses, water rights and the distribution of benefits and products;
- focusing on gender relation (differences, inequalities, power imbalances, differential access to resources) between and among women and men and not just women;
- understanding the gender dimensions of institutions at all levels in the society (within the household, community based organizations, water users associations, local governments, national civil services, etc.);
- confirming or rejecting assumption in each specific context, the specificity of each situation must be investigated – ideally the use of participatory methodologies;
- getting the initiative or project right, studying its differential impacts on women and men to ensure that all implications are clearly understood and there are no unintended negative repercussions;
- understanding gender roles, relations and inequalities that influence the choices people make and their different options and how people respond both individually or collectively.

A Concern for Equality

Experiences gained and learnt lesson indicate, evidently, that without specific attention to gender issues and initiatives, projects can reinforce inequalities between women and men and even increase imbalances.

Ideally the capacity to work with a gender analysis or perspective should be included as one of the core capacities to be developed in the consideration of all issues concerning IWRM. This capacity to identify gender issues should be one of the basic capacities for both individuals and institutions.

The fact that gender issues are a crosscutting theme in IWRM sector, yet, all too often in international and national IWRM programs they are of little consideration.

In the IWRM sector, the concerning programs and the implemented program are usually characterized with the lacking of certain issues that could be expressed in the following questions:

- *is planning for the project based on an integrated analysis of productive and domestic uses of water?*
- *Does this analysis recognize the different needs and priorities of women and men?*
- *In assessing the tradeoffs between competing demands for water have the different capacities of women and men to express their needs been taken into account?*
- *Do project activities include measures to ensure that women's voices will be heard?*
- *Have sex-disaggregated data base been developed, and can they be used to monitor impacts on women and men respectively?*

In order to fulfill the previously mentioned gaps further initiatives are required with major focusing on:

- to raise the profile of gender issues;
- to look for ways to increase demand for inclusion of gender perspectives in the broad areas of technical support, research and networking;
- to devote specific attention to specialist and expertise; and
- to promote the development and advancement of women professionals;

PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES

Experience shows that participatory processes in IWRM initiatives do not automatically recognize inequalities and differences between women and men. Attention to gender differences and inequalities is required if participatory development initiatives are to involve women as well as men. However, in most of the developing countries, the involvement of women is always hindered due to several specific issues included:

- power imbalances in communities;
- intra-household and intra-family relations;
- different constraints to participate;
- different abilities to participate; and
- perceived benefits to participate.

GENDER-SENSITIVE PARTICIPATORY PROCESSES AND ORGANIZATIONS: CHALLENGES

Participatory processes challenge organizations in many ways:

- *skills*: facilitating gender-sensitive participatory processes requires experience, skills and the ability to deal with the arising conflicts;
- *flexibility and adaptability*: the selection of methods should be based on the specific circumstances responding adequately and flexibility to specific contexts;
- *support*: exploring new issues requires support for participants both men and women. Furthermore, participatory process can take a long time and this will require support over a period of years;
- *follow-up*: this is a crucial issue for the organizations involved in the promotion of gender issues.

These tasks should not stop on implementing issues, but to follow up the results and feed back emerging from the participatory methods in action.

A GENDER POLICY

The establishment of an effective gender policy in the water sector, the following guidelines should be very carefully identified including:

- *what is a gender policy?*
- *Why to develop a gender policy?*
- *What are learned lessons from experience?*
- *What are the distinct components important for an effective gender policy?*

What is a Gender Policy?

It is a public statement of a country's or an organization's commitment to implementing gender issues and outline what this means in the context of the organization's work. It relates to either, the organization's work or the internal organization's staffing and culture or more usually to both.

Why to Develop a Gender Policy?

The development of a gender policy is a useful and common starting point for mainstreaming gender issues in an organization and its work. Generally, it provides both the organizations staff and the stakeholders the opportunity in mainstreaming gender seriously and effectively in the water sector covering the sectorial waster uses and management in an integrated approach.

For the organization which have already taken some steps towards promoting gender sensitivity, it gives the opportunity to consolidate and formalize the steps they have taken and to guide their future plans.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED FROM EXPERIENCES

Policy Evaporation is a Key Problem

All too often gender policies evaporate before implementation, and remain paper commitments only.

The reasons for that could be mainly attributed to the fact that in most gender policies strategies or action plans are included with no clearly defined activities and targets, as well as the allocation of staffing and financial resources.

Furthermore, such gender policies are not based on a realistic analysis of the organization/ministries –including their decision-making structure and planning routines and its history with respect to gender-related initiatives.

The value of a gender mainstreaming policy lies in its formulation as well as its existence. The policy should fit with the organizational culture, structures and procedures and substantially increases the chance that policy will be implemented.

Equally, gender policies, in order to be effective, should reflect their organizational and cultural context and be realistic and achievable within this.

Policy Components

Three distinct components are important for an effective gender policy:

- *situation analysis* - examining gender issues concerning beneficiary groups and concerning the organization itself. The latter includes an examination of staff knowledge, skill, commitment and practice in relation to gender issues;
- *the policy itself* - this should be fundamentally devised on the basis of the situation analysis;
- *action plan* - this sets out in detail how the policy will be implemented over a special time period, including activities, budgets, responsibility and indicators for monitoring and evaluation.

INTEGRATION OF GENDER DIMENSIONS IN WATER RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: RECOMMENDED ACTIONS

In the Mediterranean, while there are only a few gender inclusive policies in water, it is widely recognized that gender-sensitive policies are a more effective way to mediate conflicts in water issues. Politically and technically, the need for mainstreaming gender in integrated water management (IWRM), has been validated to face the increasingly water problems in the region. Institution and organizations working in partnership to place water-gender-poverty sustainable development nexus into practice have built synergy for inclusion of gender as a cross-cutting issue in integrated water resources management.

Recently, governments, civil societies and donor organizations have developed specific gender policies concerning gender and water policies for some of the Mediterranean countries. However, the lessons learned from experiences demonstrate clearly that we are still far away from integrating gender dimensions in water resources management. Implementation of those policies is facing enormous constraints and, in some cases, such policies remain paper commitments only. The reasons for that, most of those policies were not formulated and based on a realistic analysis of neither the organizations nor the stakeholders. The sequences that such policies were mostly including strategies or action plans but without a clearly defined activity and targets as well as staffing and financial resources.

This is expected, due to the absence of a guide source that provides the needed information and guidelines designed to help development organizations – government, donors and civil societies concerned with water management or service delivery to develop gender policies appropriate to their organizational context.

This requires, as a priority action, the establishment of a network including the existing experiences with a broad collection of dispersed information as a resource guide for mainstreaming gender within the context of integrated water resources management having the following objectives:

- to improve the sustainability and effectiveness of water related activities through incorporation of gender equality perspectives throughout project cycles;
- to improve approaches to the planning, implementation management and monitoring of IWRM;
- to improve understanding and awareness of gender concepts through an easy reference to existing materials, tools and information.

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