

Water demand management in the Mediterranean, progress and policies

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*Why is it critical to mainstream gender in integrated
water resources management in the Mediterranean ?*

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Abstract

Water is increasingly becoming an important strategic resource, essential for sustaining life and development. Control of water is a source of power and economic strength, and it can be a root cause of socio-political stress. In most Southern and Eastern countries of the Mediterranean, gender considerations are at the heart of providing, managing and conserving the limited fragile water resources.

In the Mediterranean it is widely recognized that gender sensitive policies are a more effective way to mediate conflicts in water issues and that mainstreaming gender in IWRM, in general, and in WDM in agricultural sector, in particular, is politically and technically validated to face the increasingly water problems in the region. However, for most developing countries in the region, the lessons learned from experiences demonstrate that implementation of those policies is facing numerous constraints and, in some cases, such policies remain paper commitments only. Many reasons are behind such situation and, above all, the chronic insufficiency of information as a resource guide for mainstreaming gender within the context of integrated demand water management as well as the exclusion of women, the main users and managers of water, from decision-making and planning which has made water management systems less responsive to demands of water services.

Emphasis this paper will be given on how to integrate gender dimensions in water resources management, identifying the constraints to build up the needed guide source to set up appropriate policies to mainstream gender dimension in the IWRM approach.

Introduction

Since the UN Water Conference in Mar del Plata, Argentina, to the 4th World Water Forum in Mexico, the global freshwater crisis has grown to the point where its impact is now globally felt.

In the arid and semi-arid developing countries, including those of the Mediterranean region, there are growing concerns over water scarcity, increasing competition for water across sectors, the sustainability of irrigation systems, water pollution and water quality degradation and the ecosystem destabilization. Those are major challenges the majority of the Mediterranean countries are facing. Meeting such challenges requires a holistic sustainable and equitable approach to water and natural resources management. This approach needs to incorporate gender, social justice, human right perspectives, women's empowerment and gender equity and equality (WSSD, 2002; MDGs, 2001). Indeed, in the past few years several international events beside many other regional and national conferences dealing with the water sector recognized the following two factors:

- by the adoption of gender approach, both efficiency and equity goals could be promoted;
- the human and social dimensions of water management are to be the corner-stone of new initiatives.

However, around these facts, most of the Mediterranean developing countries are seeking sustainable answers to several raised questions, including: *“how such policy has to be implemented? What follows at the operational level? What are gender sensitive infrastructures and services? How can we strengthen the role of women and how to ensure they have an equal voice and choice? And, as a priority question: what are the conceptual underpinnings of the gender approach?”*

This implies a better understanding of the quality, quantity and social distribution of water resources for people with particular consideration to the constraints on access to and control over water that people are facing according to their gender, ethnic, caste and class identities.

Women and water resources

Modern science and technology have widely contributed to alleviate a number of difficulties related to the great diversity characterizing the geographical distribution of freshwater resources throughout the world. Yet, ethical, normative values and legal tools to overcome the disparities in water access related to gender still need to be developed especially in the developing regions, including the Mediterranean where women are particularly exposed to serious health risks. Access to freshwater resources influences directly women's lives due to the links existing between women and water and their immediate impact on infant mortality rate. According to the WHO, UNICEF, WSSCC, 2000, approximately 250 million individuals were diagnosed with water-borne diseases at the dawn of the twenty-first century where most of them were clearly women. Women are most often the collectors, users and managers of water in households as well as the farmers of irrigated crops where at least half of the world food is grown by women farmers and it amounts to 80% in some African countries (FAO, 2000). In spite of the major involvement of women in the irrigation sector, yet, women's considerable knowledge of water resources, including quality, reliability and storage methods is too often not taken into account by decision-makers who still ignore that this hidden chest of knowledge is one of the major keys to sustainable water resources use and management and the success of irrigation projects.

Furthermore, the exclusion of women from design, planning and decision-making of water resources projects is not only a major obstacle to the improvement of their well-being (World Bank, 1995) but, also, has squandered the skills and energy of half the world's population that could be used in developing countries to provide water services and manage natural resources thus contributing to sustainable social, economic, environmental and personal development (WWC, 2000).

The time is clearly ripe to link sustainable development to gender issues. The responsibility for the use of water and its degradation includes the respect for women's dignity as well as the equal and peaceful sharing of natural resources. We need ethics to guide water resources management into the next century and women have an important role to play. On the globe, women are increasingly recognized to be key actors in the conservation and safeguarding of natural resources as managers, producers, users and

intermediaries between the natural resources and the society. However, the political and cultural impediments resulting in gender discrimination in access to and control of resources and services and, above all, the neglect of women's rights have to be eradicated through not only providing the required resources, but, equally the strong political will.

A sustainable development that doesn't involve women will not succeed in the long run (UN, 2001). Yet, much still needs to be achieved for their participation as water scientists, engineers and policy-makers and to involve them in the decision-making process: it means to give women equal access to education and capacity building programmes.

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, program 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 perspective, needs and interests to reduce gender inequalities;
- 3) participatory approach that facilitates the equitable participation of women and men, particularly at decision-making levels should be used.

IWRM

It is a cross-sectorial policy approach to respond to the growing demands for water in the context of finite supplies and is defined as "***a process which promotes the coordinated development and management of water, land and related resources in order to maximize the resultant economic and social welfare in an equitable manner without compromising the sustainability of the vital eco-systems (GWP, 2000)***".

There is an increasing urgent 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 by 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 central 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.

GENDER

Gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women and the relationship between them. Gender is seen as the social construction of men’s and women’s role in a given culture or location. These socially determined roles are influenced by historical, religious, economic, cultural and ethnic factors.

Gender approach in IWRM UNDP, 1995 defined it as:

Taking account of gender concerns in all policy, programme, and initiative and financial activities and in organizational procedures, thereby contributing to a profound organizational transformation, specifically bringing the outcome of socio economic and policy analysis into all decision-making processes of the organization and tracing the outcome including both the core decision organization and small everyday decisions of implementation.

Gender and participation in water resources management: present situation

At the level of policy formulation, there seems to be widespread consensus about the need to include women in community organizations for resources management and conservation. The Dublin Statement on Water and the Environment (UNDP, 1992) adopted:

“Principle No.3: Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.... Acceptance and implementation of this principle requires positive policies to address women’s specific needs and to equip and empower women to participate at all levels in water resources programmes, including decision-making and implementation, in ways defined by them (ICWE, 1992:4)”.

Many projects and programs which involve the organization of community based groups do make explicit mention of their intention to guarantee some degree of participation of women. Contrary to the expectations raised by these policy statements, there exists very little evidence of explicit attempts at increasing or improving the involvement of women. Most of the “mainstream” literature on natural resource management (especially irrigation) does not mention gender differences (other than in the form of the occasional obligatory statements that “more attention is needed”) or differentiate between male and female users.

Gender differences in water needs have not been widely documented. Nor is there a lot of documentation about women’s uses of water, or of women’s involvement in irrigated agriculture. Increasing the recognition and legitimacy of women’s water related needs and interests and of gender as a source of differences as regards those needs and interests crucially depends on more information and on research to gather this information. At present, we can notify that, globally there is a better understanding and more awareness of gender issues involved in water management and a range of initiatives have been introduced to improve the situation. However, too many projects and programmes focus on the practical rather than strategic needs of women. Focusing should be given to the water rights, those would provide women with permanent means of production and the basis to greater wealth creation, long term prosperity and financial security (Hamdy, 2005).

Introducing gender mainstreaming in water resources. Major reasons.

In this context, the driving forces are numerous among them the following to be highlighted:

- In most developing countries, including those of the Mediterranean and Middle East regions, poor targeting, inequitable distribution of benefits and burdens, and poor operation and maintenance

Gender mainstreaming is:

- Promoting the full and equal participation of women in decision making in all areas and at all levels;
- Using gender analysis on a routine basis to identify the differential access to and impacts on women and men of all projects, programs and policies,
- Using such analysis to devise measures to bring about equal participation and equal benefits for women and men.

structures have hindered development projects aimed at addressing issues of sustainable development in water resources management.

- Where resources are scarce, as it is the case for water, there is competition for supplies and those at the lowest end of the

Mainstreaming – focuses on developing institutional mechanisms and strategies to effectively implement a gender-oriented approach in all areas of the mainstream.

power spectrum – often the poor and women in particular - will go without. Applying a gender analysis helps development agencies to better target their resources and to ensure that gender perspectives are taken into account following a gender policy.

- Water scarcity and its fragility pose different challenges for rural men and women because

Mainstreaming requires projects, programs and policies to promote and support changes in men's, as well as women's, gender roles, attitudes and behaviors.

of their different roles, relations and responsibilities, opportunities and constraints and uneven access and control of resources, those all are in need to gender mainstreaming; and

Furthermore, agricultural, environmental and related water policies and programmes often fail to recognize women's particular needs and the crucial contribution in the use and the management of water resources.

Accordingly, in the arid and semi-arid countries, and particularly those of the Mediterranean, still more work needs to be done to integrate a gender mainstreaming in

Mainstreaming involves changing gender relationships between women and men in order to achieve more equal sharing of power and responsibility, benefiting both women and men.

policy, projects and programmes concerning the IWRM. The commitments made at international conferences and conventions need to be translated into practice, with the full and equal participation of women and men of the local, national and international levels.

Gender mainstreaming. Gaps and weakness.

Generally for most countries of the Mediterranean gender mainstreaming in water resources is not well defined facing several constraints and characterized with certain weakness. Those are mostly due to the absence of some of the following requirements: clear objectives and targets on gender equality, gender analysis, monitoring and reporting and resources and capacity, tools and dialogue of gender equality. However, such requirements are not sufficient to achieve gender equality in water management. Much remains to be done to meet the outstanding problems between women and men in the water sector use and management.

The widening socio-economic disparities between men and woman, the absence of women views in planning and implementation of water aspects, the non-systematic incorporation of women into water resources management, the limited involvements of women in water decision making and maintenance, the deficiencies in gender among water organizations in particular and society in general, all are problems seeking appropriate actions and reasonable solutions. That's why to achieve gender equality, much remains to be done.

What is recommended to be done?

In view of the issues included in this paper, technically and politically our thoughts should be directed towards: "*how do we at the Mediterranean see the future of*

women, water? And, how to work over the next coming years to achieve gender equity and equality in water resources management?"

Key lessons learned from experiences in the region clearly indicate that gender mainstreaming in the water sector is surrounded with various difficulties and constraints which still needs a better understanding and further improvement.

The crucial question is: *"how gender mainstreaming strategies can be pursued successfully in the Mediterranean countries?"* Working towards such main object, it is recommended the following:

- Understanding of gender mainstreaming and gender approach, hence in most countries, due to lack of understanding and the will to change, gender is often thought as side-streamed rather than mainstreamed. Equally, gender mainstreaming should be understood as a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres. This is also the case for gender approach which requires an open mind capable of leading and organizing both women and men to work together in harmony to realize the fullest possible participation of both women and men.
- Investments must be made in building local capacity of women and their organizations (Murthy and Rao, 1997). Women need to build their capacity to be effective users, managers and also owners of water sources, storage and supply. Women's self-help groups and federations need investments in building their capacity and outreach to plan, manage, account and perform. Such capable organizations improve the performance of the water sector.
- Political as it may appear, we need to build the collective organized strength of women as water users, managers and owners. Without membership based, democratic and active alliances of women water users, women will remain isolated and inadequately represented in the sector. If the water sector has to grow in the democratic set-up, it must invest in women water users organizing themselves.

- To make water sector activities meaningful to women at the local level, we must link it with their activities that build work, income and assets. This means capital formation at the grassroots. Without making sustained and sufficient supply of resources and capital available at the grassroots, the women will not be able to influence and get involved in water sector decisions. That is, water sector activities, such as irrigation, must generate direct income for women and help them save, capitalize and own local assets.
- Legal systems need to be developed and adapted to assist women in obtaining or protecting their rights. Of importance to emphasize that policies designed by outsiders cannot anticipate all potential changes, nor simply legislate equality of access between men and women.

Lastly and importantly, the water sector work must help women build social security. That is, the water sector work must improve their health, reduce illness in their family, ensure work to women and improve working conditions. Without contributing towards social security of women, the water sector will remain isolated from the rural mainstream and marginalized in rural development efforts.

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