

Gender mainstreaming in water management

Abou-Elazm M.

in

Hamdy A. (ed.), Sagardoy J.A. (ed.), Quagliariello R. (ed.), Trisorio-Liuzzi G. (ed.).
Integration of Gender Dimension in water management in the Mediterranean region :
INGEDI Project

Bari : CIHEAM

Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 62

2004

pages 77-79

Article available on line / Article disponible en ligne à l'adresse :

<http://om.ciheam.org/article.php?IDPDF=6002403>

To cite this article / Pour citer cet article

Abou-Elazm M. **Gender mainstreaming in water management**. In : Hamdy A. (ed.), Sagardoy J.A. (ed.), Quagliariello R. (ed.), Trisorio-Liuzzi G. (ed.). *Integration of Gender Dimension in water management in the Mediterranean region : INGEDi Project*. Bari : CIHEAM, 2004. p. 77-79 (Options Méditerranéennes : Série A. Séminaires Méditerranéens; n. 62)



<http://www.ciheam.org/>
<http://om.ciheam.org/>

GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN WATER MANAGEMENT

M. Abou-Elazm*

* Head of Environmental Quality Sector, EEAA, Head of Gender Unit, EEAA,
Member of the National Council for Women (NWC)

Water is a finite and vulnerable resource that is essential to all forms of life on earth. It is a key element for various human development activities. Scarcity of freshwater resources globally is fast becoming a major factor in limiting the development in arid and semi-arid regions. There exists a strong need to save water and allocate it among various users ensuring the satisfaction of social and economic requirements and the conservation of the environment. However, due to the increase in population and associated rise in the standards of living and human economic and social activities, the demands on water are significantly intensifying. Water resources systems in many countries are extremely fragile where a delicate balance between resources and requirements in these countries is maintained. Water resources management affects different life aspects including socio-economic and environmental aspects as well as people's health.

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) presented at the Third World Water Forum in Japan in 2003 have identified several goals that significantly are intended to improve the human conditions by 2015. Some of these goals are directly linked to water, while others are considered to have an indirect relation with water.

Human activities, together with population density, have severely overwhelmed the environment's carrying capacity in Egypt. Water resource degradation and air pollution are two main environmental threats to human health, both chronic and acute, and are thought to contribute thousands of health problems every year. Irrigation practices and inappropriate disposal of solid waste have lead to soil degradation and are currently national concerns. Water management is the government's top priority since recent trends suggest that the country will face adverse water shortage by 2025 when water availability per capita will be halved.

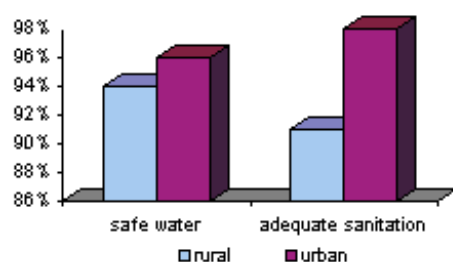


Fig. 1. Percentage of the population with access to safe water and adequate sanitation, 2000.
Source: UN Social Indicators

According to official statistics, only about 4% of those economically active in agriculture in 1986 were women, and this rose to about 10% when unpaid family labor was included. However, statistics often do not reflect the true contribution of women to agriculture because they exclude women's subsistence production and domestic work. Surveys show that majority of rural women participate in agricultural activities, particularly those related to food security and animal production. More than 50% of rural women are actively involved in tasks such as fertilization, weeding, harvesting, sacking, marketing and storage. Some also undertake ploughing and irrigation. About 70% of their working time in agriculture is devoted to animal husbandry.

While the division of labor between men and women varies by crop, overall men carry out most of the land preparation, planting, weeding, irrigation and pest control. Women contribute moderately to seed preparation, fertilization and harvesting, and significantly to storage and marketing. Food

processing is the primary responsibility of women. In animal husbandry, men are primarily responsible for the care of water buffalo, donkeys, cows and sheep, while women carry out most of the milking, processing and marketing of milk and animal products. In fisheries, fish catching, feeding and marketing are primarily men's tasks, while women contribute about 52% of the labour in fish processing and net-making, and carry out 42% of net maintenance and repair. Women also carry out virtually all domestic tasks, including water and fuel collection, and food processing and preparation.

Women in the rural area work all day long, doing household work or productive activities. In spite of providing a great deal of labor, it is not considered as economic activities but regarded as a part of housewives' role. In the rural area, traditionally women's role is not appreciated except for raising children. Social activities are responsible for the male head of household. Women have less opportunity to participate decision making in both of inside and outside of household. Men have almost exclusive authority on matters related to seeds, buying and selling of livestock and land, use of herbicides and agricultural machinery, what to grow and where to sell produce. Women make decisions on poultry and contribute to decisions on agriculture projects and the vaccination of livestock.

In the rural area, 60% of households is led by women because of their husbands' absence (44% in the urban area). In addition to household work, women are in charge of the production of crops for self-consumption (Arab Republic of Egypt, 1995). According to CAPM AS Expenditure Survey 1996, female-headed households are 22% at the national level, 22.8% in the urban and 21% in the rural area (Arab Republic of Egypt, Census, 1996).

Although women are protected under the "Personal Status Law" in marriage, the lack of legal knowledge makes women disadvantaged. The issue is to advocate gender consciousness to the people in the rural area due to eliminate their discrimination.

Although most of the rural women are in charge of economic activities not only in agriculture but also in manufacturing at home or other part time jobs, their actual working situations are not grasped exactly, because such informal activities are not reflected to the statistics. There is the lack of investigations of female employment in the informal sector.

A shift to more specialized irrigation management may provide particular benefits to women farmers, who would tend to be more affected by disorganized methods of distribution which favour the powerful members, often men. The problems related to water were the same for men and women. Most of the women are well informed about the problems of irrigation and drainage and they need to be heard. Thus, women's involvement in water management and the water Users Associations (WUA) is an important issue to ensure that irrigation management serves their needs. Hence ways and means of enhancing women involvement in WUAs should be looked into.

Recently, the female participation in the informal sector is increasing, and this sector accepts excessive labor force. The reasons for the expansion of this sector are:

- Increasing living costs
- Insufficient social securities
- Unemployment
- Lack of support by husband or family

For the women working in the informal sector, their status in the family is not upgraded in spite of their additional income to the households. Female work should be approved by the male family members.

Most of workers in this sector are illiterate and not protected by the union or law. Neither they have as rights as workers like paid holidays, fixed work time nor health management. In many cases, they tend to be exploited because they have to work under less favored conditions.

In general, female employed rate is still low. Mainly it is justified by the inaccurate estimation of female's contribution in economic activities in particular in agriculture. Partly, it is based on the gap of educational opportunities between women and men. Although there is not significant sex difference at the primary level, as higher level, sex gap becomes wide due to higher dropping out rates for girls in particular in the Upper Egypt. 70% of employees are still dominated by men. For the majority part of women, the opportunities of social participation are still limited

Equitable development implies that women receive a fair share of development resources and benefits. Past experience in water resources management has demonstrated that even a people-centered approach does not automatically ensure women's and men's needs and priorities are reflected in programming. Without an understanding of the different starting points of women and men (responsibility, resources, priorities) and explicitly consideration of gender equality issues, there is no guarantee that women will receive a fair share of development resources.

It is expected that in the near future the water supplies available from both conventional and non-conventional resources will not be enough to satisfy the increasing demands for water. Also, more concern is now given to water quality issues rather than water quantity. Therefore, MWRI has recently shifted its long going policy paradigm of water resources development to water demand management. Demand responsive approaches involving users in all aspects of water management. Because of the traditional gender-based division of roles and responsibilities, women and men often have different priorities, knowledge in the use and management of water resources. If these are not taken into account, it would have a crucial impact on the level of implementing the water policies and its sustainability, because women's and men's expertise, commitment and traditional management functions would go unrecognized. Thus what is needed is a gender-balanced approach in services participation and management in which access to new information, division of work and sharing of decision making, resources and benefits is divided equitably between women and men of different age group, classes and ethnic and religious groups. This will encourage an effective and sustained water resource sector, a condition for and part of wider socio-economic development.

Gender Mainstreaming is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

Gender mainstreaming depicted in the national Five Year Plan mentioned to upgrade female roles in water usage. It laid stress on to promote female participation in the planning and decision-making on water supply and environmental protection.

A Presidential Decree established the National Council for Women (NCW) in February 2000 as an independent institution under the Presidency of the Republic with the mission of promoting the advancement of the Egyptian woman and enhancing her social, economic and political status. The Council, presided over by the First Lady of Egypt, strives to bring women's concerns into the mainstream and thus overcome the problem of marginalization. NCW aims to enhance the status of all Egyptian women and to maximize their contribution to the growth and development of Egypt. The focus is on narrowing existing socio-economic gender gaps and addressing women's strategic needs including social, economic and political empowerment.

A primary concern for NCW is to draw a national strategy for the advancement of women and to work closely with line ministries in order to mainstream it in the National Five Year Plan. Among other things, this will ensure the inclusion of priority programmes on women and the required funding for them. This includes training planners in line ministries in gender planning in order to mainstream gender in sectoral, regional and national development plans. One of the most crucial functions played by NCW is raising public awareness on women's issues and creating a broad base of support and understanding of the pivotal role of women in society. A variety of communication channels are currently being utilized.

There are gender units established in every ministry to work with the NWC to achieve its goals. The Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs established a gender unit to serve as a catalyst to integrate women into the mainstream of policies programs and projects. Technical support and training is a continuous process of the gender unit.