

Gender mainstreaming: An essential component of sustainable water management

Evidence shows that the meaningful involvement of women in water resources development and management can help make projects more sustainable, ensure that infrastructure development yields the maximum social and economic returns, and advance progress on Millennium Development Goals.

National Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and water efficiency strategies and plans are an opportunity to enhance the equal participation, representation, and rights of women in the water sector. This includes creating policies and laws that institutionalize the equitable participation of men and women, fostering the development of institutions and organizations that are gender-sensitive and that have sufficient expertise in gender analysis and mainstreaming, and establishing budgeting processes that ensure steady and secure resources to support the necessary structures and programs.

Policy makers and practitioners increasingly recognize that women and men have different interests in, and derive different benefits from, the availability, use and management of water; and that women and girls are hardest hit by poor water and sanitation services. Although the water community has made significant strides in designing programs and policies that take into account the differing roles and responsibilities of women and men, most of the progress has been in the area of domestic water supply and sanitation. Much remains to be done on the broader questions of *water resources management, development and productive use*.

Indeed, women and their concerns remain mostly invisible in decision-making and governance structures, planning, policy-making, and infrastructure and technology development as well as in the institutions that control and manage water across the world. For example, women produce 60 percent to 80 percent of the food in developing countries, yet women's role as farmers is frequently overlooked by policy makers and irrigation managers. As a consequence, women farmers often lack access to water supplies (when, for example, land titles are required for irrigation systems in areas where women cannot own land).

Why does this matter? The chief reason is effectiveness: involving the people who are directly engaged in using, managing and developing water resources in decision-making around water leads to better policies and projects. At least half of those people are women—women managing domestic water supply, women farmers and entrepreneurs using water resources for production, women acting in their socio-cultural roles as community natural resource managers and guardians of traditional knowledge.

Evidence shows that the meaningful involvement of women in water resources development, management and use can:

- lead to the design of effective new solutions to water problems;
- help governments avoid poor investments and expensive mistakes;
- make projects more sustainable;
- ensure that infrastructure development yields the maximum social and economic returns;
- further development goals, for instance the Millennium Development Goals on hunger, child mortality, and gender equality.

Clearly, therefore, using a gender mainstreaming approach systematically within the overall framework of IWRM can make water policies and programs better—more effective and more sustainable. The Global Water Partnership (GWP) has identified three spheres of activity that must be developed and strengthened concurrently to ensure an effective water management system—the enabling environment, institutional roles and management instruments.

Box 1: Definitions

Gender refers to the socially constructed rather than biologically determined roles of men and women as well as the relationships between them in a given society at a specific time and place. These roles and relationships are not fixed, but can and do change. They are usually unequal in terms of power, freedom, agency, and status as well as access to and control over entitlements, resources, and assets.

Gender mainstreaming was defined by the United Nations in 1997 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 the policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.” Among the key tools of gender mainstreaming is **gender analysis**, which seeks to determine the differences between men and women in terms of rights, responsibilities, access to resources, power and the like in a given situation.

The enabling environment—policies, legislation, and financing

The term “enabling environment” in the context of gender mainstreaming in water resources development, management and use includes policies and laws that institutionalize the equitable participation of men and women; and steady and secure resources to support the necessary structures and programs.

Developing laws, policies and strategies

Experience has shown that mainstreaming gender in the policy formulation process requires the following:

- The commitment of politicians and others in power. Without the stated political commitment and support of leaders of key institutions, gender mainstreaming is rarely implemented;

- A stated focus on gender in key written documents (including identification of gender gaps in the water sector, clear statements on how these gaps will be reduced or closed, and a roadmap for how this will be achieved in the short, medium and long run);
- Clarification of the entitlements and responsibilities of water users and water providers (specified by gender);
- Clarification of the roles of government, private sector and civil society institutions (specifying the rights, duties and obligations of men and women, where appropriate);
- Legal status for water management institutions of government and water user groups, stipulating the proportional share of women in participation and employment;
- Multistakeholder consultations that include women and women's organizations;
- Indicative budgetary allocations showing proportions to be spent in proactive measures that directly benefit and/or indirectly support women (see the next section on budgeting).

Gender analysis is the backbone of gender-sensitive policy development (see box 2). It is a useful approach throughout the policy formulation cycle, particularly in the initial phase:

- Prior to formulating a formal water policy, baseline studies should be conducted to identify use patterns disaggregated by sex, as well as gaps between men and women in terms of ownership/control, representation, access and entitlements in relation to water resources;

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Box 2: The Gender Analysis Framework

Gender analysis is an examination of women's as well as men's roles, resources, needs and priorities in relation to water. The Gender Analysis Framework is now widely used for situation analysis and pre-project research, especially in project-based development interventions. It has the following elements:

- Activity profile: who does what in the target sector.
- Access and control profile: who has what (power, clout, assets).
- Analysis of factors and trends: which factors influence gender differences.
- Institutional analysis: how and by whom the policy will be implemented and managed.

Some of the following questions would be useful components of gender research for designing integrated approaches to water resources development, management and use:

- Have sex-disaggregated databases been developed, and can they be used to monitor policy impacts on women and men? If not, they should be designed and used.
- Is planning based on authentic data on productive and domestic uses of water by both men and women? If not, such data should be collected.
- Does the policy design 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?
- Are there measures in place to ensure that women's perspectives, needs and priorities inform policy implementation?

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- The resulting sex-disaggregated data and statistics should then inform the formulation process, with clear measures put in place to close gaps between men and women. Gender-sensitive indicators should be developed for monitoring and evaluation, as they will provide a tool for tracking progress and holding politicians and managers accountable for results;
- Although it is not the optimal approach, even after policies are finalized or under implementation, gender-sensitive strategies can still be developed. This is particularly needed for gender-blind water policies.

Budgeting

National budgets reflect the priorities and development vision of governments. They perform central economic and social functions, such as allocating resources, providing basic social services, stabilizing prices, and generating economic growth and employment. They also reflect the tradeoffs that governments have to make to advance different agendas, and underlying these tradeoffs is the relative power of different social groups.

Gender-responsive budgeting, known as “gender budgeting”, involves the analysis of national budgets from the perspective of their impact on women and men, boys and girls. This analysis is also sometimes called a “gender audit.” Pioneered in Australia and South Africa, gender budgeting exercises analyze the likely impacts of planned spending, and supply parliamentarians and advocacy groups with “gender-aware” budgetary information that can be used for advocacy. Gender budgeting, which has been implemented in more than 50 countries worldwide, reveals who is allocated what in different development fields and has been effective in exposing the gap between government commitments to certain social policies and actual spending. Gender budgeting generally involves collaboration among many groups, since experience has shown that a broadly shared understanding of budget allocations and processes leads to more effective advocacy for change. A powerful tool to measure whether public expenditure matches policy commitments to gender equality, gender budgeting has in recent years become a component of macro-economic policy in many countries.

An example is the reform of the budgetary system and the institutionalization of gender budgeting within the Gender Reform Action Plan of the Government of Pakistan, which will eventually apply to all departments, including water. It states that the objective of gender-sensitive budgeting is to produce better and more equitable policies, programs and resource allocations. The plan involves the generation of data, and it provides an analytical basis for review of policies and programs. It outlines several specific measures, all of which have costs, timelines and responsibilities attached to them. For instance, the government is required to conduct sex-disaggregated beneficiary analyses and sex-disaggregated public expenditure analyses to see where government money is going and who is benefiting from it. There are mechanisms for the formal participation of civil society for information-sharing and advocacy, capacity building exercises for parliamentarians, and incentive grants for local governments.

Institutional roles and organizational frameworks

Developing and implementing water policies that are equitable and sustainable—and therefore more effective—requires institutions and organizations that are gender-sensitive and have sufficient expertise in gender analysis and mainstreaming. Making organizations more gender-sensitive can be attempted in two different ways. The first is to promote gender parity and build capacity for gender analysis and gender-sensitive policy-making at all levels within existing organizations. The second is to support gender units (within larger institutions) or free-standing women’s organizations to provide gender expertise, build capacity for gender analysis and mainstreaming, pilot test affirmative action measures, and lobby for change. Often a combination of the two approaches is most effective—for example, a gender unit within an organization can work with line management to identify mainstreaming opportunities and build staff capacity for gender-sensitive policy-making, while also providing expertise when needed, managing a budget to support strategic interventions, and networking with outside advocacy groups and gender experts.

In both cases, capacity building is essential. Efforts to build the mainstreaming capacity of individuals and organizations in the water sector should start with a clear rationale for gender mainstreaming that is based on the ways in which mainstreaming makes policies more effective, leads to new solutions, helps to avoid costly mistakes, and maximizes the economic and social returns on infrastructure investments. In general, technical experts (in water as well as in other fields) are more likely to be persuaded by what could be called “effectiveness arguments” than by political or theoretical appeals. Training should be grounded in real-life case studies from the water sector and center on how using practical mainstreaming tools, checklists, sample indicators, and tested methodologies can make participants more effective in their work.

To be truly representative, political and governance structures for water resource management should have, or at least visibly strive for, gender parity. Box 3 illustrates how this can be achieved at different levels.

Institutional reform programs must take into account from the outset the ways in which formal and informal institutions are shaped by unequal gender relations. These institutions tend to reproduce gender-based inequality unless they are appropriately redesigned during the reform process. Current governance reforms in many developing countries have not paid enough attention to gender issues, except in discussions on decentralization. Yet there are many instances of gender-specific capacity failures in public water institutions targeted for reform. Public expenditure management systems frequently fail to acknowledge women’s needs or to distribute budgetary resources equally. The civil service and judiciary may be dominated by men. Women workers clustered at the bottom of state bureaucracies may be the first to be fired when cost-cutting efficiencies are introduced.

Participatory decision-making means that men and women at every level in water agencies or institutions as well as in user groups have a say on how that agency or user group incorporates the perspectives, needs and wants of different groups in society. A good point at which to begin may be at the river basin (and sub-basin) level.

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Box 3:
Political Participation
Related Citizen Action

National	Representation or direct participation of both men and women in national elected assembly and other legislative bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public hearings • Civic engagement in national policy and planning processes • Lobbying for change through representational system • Intermediate advocacy groups supporting rights claims • Interactions with water officials • Informal advocacy through contacts, e.g., interactions with sympathetic officials • Use of media and campaigning
State/provincial	Representation or participation of both men and women in state/provincial elected bodies	
Regional	Representation or participation of both men and women at river basin level in management councils	
Local	Representation or participation of both men and women in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • River basin management committees at sub-basin level • Irrigation districts • Other associations of water users • Municipal/local elected bodies • Community groups 	

In addition to the actions above, local citizen groups can also engage in:

- Engagement in local governance planning, e.g., on public services priorities
- Informal negotiation over entitlement to resources
- Meetings between water users

Source: Adapted from Moser, C and Norton, To Claim our Rights: Livelihood Security, Human Rights and Sustainable Development, ODI, 2001.

In order to ensure that water strategies lead to equity, efficiency and sustainability, institutional arrangements are needed to enable the following:

- A consortium of stakeholders involved in decision-making, with representation of all sections of society and a gender balance;
- Water resources management based on hydrological boundaries, as defined and agreed to by both local men and women;
- Organizational structures at basin and sub-basin levels to enable decision-making at the lowest appropriate level, with the participation of both men and women;
- Coordination by government of the national management of water resources across water-use sectors, while steadily increasing the proportion of women engaged as professionals, managers, and decision-makers.

One example is the approach taken by the Area Water Partnerships in South Asia, which emerged out of the need to find tangible and feasible units for institutionalizing integrated approaches to water management in a region where the river basins are huge and unwieldy. Because women are active managers of water at the household level, but largely passive or kept out of decisions on issues of water, food, agriculture and water infrastructure development, parallel “women-only” Women and Water Networks were created to work with the Area Partnerships. Members of the networks are part of the Partnership steering committees or boards. The objectives of the networks at the Area Partnership level are to promote women’s issues and gender mainstreaming in all Partnership programmes.

These women's networks perform many valuable functions for their affiliated Partnerships, such as:

- Identifying women's organizations and women members in the geographical and program areas who can represent a women's perspective on water and highlight those issues that particularly affect women;
- Strengthening the role of women and women's organizations in the planning, development and management of the Area Partnerships;
- Conducting and building capacity for gender analysis at all levels of policy, planning programs and project implementation;
- Promoting gender budgeting in the work of the Area Partnership;
- Exchanging information, experiences and good practices with other networks.

Management instruments: IWRM strategies and plans

One key management instrument to catalyze change towards more sustainable approaches to water is the design and adoption of national IWRM and water efficiency strategies and plans, which many countries are currently preparing. The development of IWRM strategies and plans presents unique opportunities for enhancing the equal participation, representation, and rights of women in the water sector—and thus for improving the effectiveness and sustainability of those strategies.

In practice, gender mainstreaming in the formulation of water strategies and plans essentially entails three steps: (1) carrying out a good gender analysis as part of creating a knowledge base for decision-making; (2) anchoring women in the decision-making process; and (3) developing sex-disaggregated indicators and incorporating them in monitoring and evaluation systems. Each of these steps is described in some detail in the companion technical brief.

Key lessons

- Evidence shows that the meaningful involvement of women in water resources development, management and use can lead to the design of effective new solutions to water problems.
- Using a gender mainstreaming approach systematically entails mainstreaming gender in the three spheres of activity that must be developed and strengthened concurrently to ensure an effective water management system—the enabling environment, institutional roles and management instruments.
- Strengthening the enabling environment in the context of gender mainstreaming entails establishing policies and laws that institutionalize the equitable participation of men and women as well as budgeting processes that ensure steady and secure resources to support the necessary structures and programs.
- Strengthening institutional roles means fostering the development of institutions and organizations that are gender-sensitive and have sufficient expertise in gender analysis and mainstreaming. Institutional reform programs must take into account the ways in which formal and informal institutions are shaped by unequal gender relations.
- One key management instrument to catalyze change towards more sustainable approaches is the design and adoption of national IWRM and water efficiency strategies and plans, a process which presents unique opportunities for enhancing the equal participation, representation, and rights of women in the water sector.

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Resources and further reading

Gender and Water Alliance (GWA) – a network of more than 500 member institutions and professionals that is an Associated Programme of the Global Water Partnership, supports knowledge-sharing and advocacy. Its website is a source of useful materials and contacts and includes a Gender and IWRM tutorial for water managers developed by GWA and Cap-Net.

It can be found at <http://www.genderandwater.org>

Mainstreaming gender in water management, a practical journey to sustainability – a recently updated resource guide developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the GWA that identifies several excellent checklists and other resource materials for incorporating gender in water supply and sanitation initiatives.

It can be found at: http://www.undp.org/water/docs/resource_guide.pdf.

Documents drawn on in the preparation of this brief that may provide useful further information include:

1. *Integrated Water Resources Management*. TEC Background Paper 4, GWP, 1998.
2. *Unlocking the door to social development and economic growth: how a more integrated approach to water can help*. TEC Policy Brief, GWP, 2004.
3. *A Gender Perspective in the Water Resources Management Sector, Handbook for Mainstreaming*. Department for Natural Resources and the Environment, SIDA, Stockholm, 1997.
4. *Budgets as if People Mattered: Democratizing Macroeconomic Policies*. By Nilufer Cagatay, Mumtaz Keklik, Radhika Lal and James Lang, UNDP, 2000.
5. *Gender Briefing Kit*. UNDP, 1995.
6. *Gender Mainstreaming: What it is, how to do it, a resource kit*. UNDP, 2005.
7. *Gender and Macroeconomic Policy: Reform Imperatives for PRSP*. Reyes S, UNDP, 2003.
8. *Gender Equality, Striving for Justice in an Unequal World*. Executive Summary, UNRISD, Switzerland, 2005.
9. *Gender Reform Action Plan (GRAP)*. Volume 1, pp 46 – 51, Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Women Development, Social Welfare and Special Education, Islamabad, 2004.

The brief was prepared by Kristen Lewis under the direction of the GWP Technical Committee, drawing extensively on the concepts outlined in “Gender Mainstreaming in IWRM” by TEC member Simi Kamal, the documents listed under “further reading”, and materials and comments received from the Gender and Water Alliance and the UN’s Interagency Gender and Water Task Force.

About the Catalyzing Change Series

The brief is part of a series of policy and technical briefs designed to help countries accelerate their efforts to achieve the action target for the preparation of IWRM and water efficiency strategies and plans set by the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) and reinforced by the 2005 World Summit. The series tackles key issues and potential stumbling blocks and attempts to give countries at the beginning of the process the benefit of lessons learned from those further down the path.

The series complements *Catalyzing Change: A Handbook for Developing Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) and Water Efficiency Strategies*. The handbook and all associated briefs can be downloaded from www.gwpforum.org or hard copies can be requested from gwp@gwpforum.org.

The briefs in this series are intended to be dynamic rather than static documents. We will continue to update and improve them based on your input. Please send comments and questions to Christie Walkuski at walkuski@iri.columbia.edu.