

Gender and WASH: Some Basics

Some definitions:

Gender

Identifies the social relations between men and women. It refers to the relationship between men and women, boys and girls. It also identifies how these relationships are socially constructed. Gender roles are dynamic and change over time.

This is distinct from the concept of 'sex', which: Identifies the biological differences between men and women. For example, women can give birth, and men provide sperm. These sex roles are universal.

Gender equality

Means that women and men enjoy the same status. Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realising their full human rights and potential and to benefit from the results. Gender equality is therefore the equal valuing by society of both the similarities and differences between women and men, and the varying roles that they play. (from Gender-Based Analysis: A Guide for Policy Making, Status of Women, Canada, 1996)

Gender equity

Is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, measures must often be available to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field. Equity leads to equality.

(from Gender-Based Analysis: A Guide for Policy Making, Status of Women, Canada, 1996)

Why do we need to think about gender?

- There are socially determined differences between men and women based on learned behaviour, which affect their ability to access and control resources
- Access and control are also determined by other factors such as: class, ethnicity, age, (dis)ability, location, sexuality, nationality etc.

Gender awareness is about recognising that...

- Women and men have different needs based on their different roles
- Structural inequalities exist in every society that disadvantage women on social, political and economic levels.
- Women's needs and rights are often made invisible or ignored

- Men can also be negatively affected because of social expectations of how they should behave and what they should achieve.
- The contributions of both men and women are needed for positive and lasting change

Why Gender Matters in WASH

‘The water project failure rate in developing countries is astonishingly high - as many as 50% of projects fail for one reason or another.’

http://www.water1st.org/crisis/sustainable_projects.html

‘A study by the International Water and Sanitation Centre (IRC) of community water and sanitation projects in 88 communities found that projects designed and run with the full participation of women are more sustainable and effective than those that do not. This supports an earlier World Bank study that found that women’s participation was strongly associated with water and sanitation project effectiveness.’

<http://www.dworm.gov.vn/en/index.php?cires=News&in=viewst&sid=24>

‘Water supplies closer to home and operational do have the potential to dramatically reduce the collection burden of girls and women, but project failure is considerable worldwide...Water and sanitation can have a significant impact on girls and women if programming is focused on transferring real responsibility to women and girls rather than just assuming they’ll benefit.’

<http://www.waterworld.com>

WASH projects traditionally fail women and girls because they tend to:

- Give little attention to women’s diverse roles, perspectives and needs
- Rarely systematically factor gender considerations into resource-allocation decisions
- Be based on ‘traditional’ assumptions about women, uncritically accepted, not challenged
- Are based on simplistic and linear assumptions about motivations for change that do not match women’s perspectives – eg the ways busy women value combinations of time, cost, convenience and water quality may be more complex than assumed
- Undermine women by overlooking them in WASH planning – at a high cost for development at household level and beyond
- Focus on short-term indicators of success – finishing on schedule and within budget and meeting technical and quantitative targets – lack of time to foster equitable participation and good listening
- Tend to reinforce women’s domestic roles – fail to foster male sharing of domestic responsibilities

- Offer new opportunities to men but not to women (eg training, new roles and responsibilities)
- Tend to focus on women's roles as static rather than understanding the dynamic nature of gender relations and therefore focusing on joint responsibility
- Pay little attention to intra-household water usage patterns to find out whether women and girls have equitable access to household water (research suggests that frequently they do not)
- Often overlook specific sanitation needs of women and adolescent girls (eg lunar cycle)
- Fail to understand issues of women's and girls' specific need for privacy and safety

WASH projects and women's triple roles

- Tend to focus on women's **reproductive** rather than **productive** roles: women's water needs for home-based **productive** tasks are often overlooked – eg cooking food to sell, brewing beer or wine, running tea kiosks, petty trading, handicraft production
- Tend to focus on and reproduce women's **social** reproductive roles – cooking, cleaning, child care, etc: women's labour on 'reproductive' water roles can have 'productive' value eg if she did not spend time on water collection, water would have to be bought, at an economic cost to the household
- Note that the distinction between women's reproductive and productive roles not always clear - eg growing food (**social reproductive** role); sell surplus, (**productive**)

Good WASH planning recognises the complex reality of women's lives - addresses **strategic gender interests** as well as **practical gender needs**

Some things to think about:

Female headed households do not appear to be worse off than male headed households in terms of use of protected and piped water sources. In fact survey results indicate that more female headed households use protected sources than male headed households in both rural and urban areas. This suggests that women headed households tend to choose protected water sources and/or prioritise water within the household budget.

Source: report by Ministry of Water and Livestock Development, WaterAid Tanzania and Eastern Africa Statistical Training Centre and National Bureau of Statistics

'Although toting water for families is considered to be the work of women and children, when it comes to toting water for pay, young men monopolise the work – using wheelbarrows and bicycles however, and not head loads!'

Source: Tanzania Gender Networking Program