

Promotion of developing countries

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Water supply, sanitation and gender

- **Does water have a gender?**

In almost all societies, men and women have different roles in water issues. This is particularly the case in rural regions. In many places women and sometimes girls are responsible for carrying and storing the water for drinking and domestic use in the household. This requires a great deal of physical work and consumes a lot of time. This time cannot then be spent on other tasks or on education. Moreover, it is usually the women who decide how the water is used in the household.

Water-induced diseases hamper women in particular in the exercise of their role as the caretakers of sick family members.

On the other hand, urban water supply and sanitation companies employ mostly men as engineers, operations managers and technicians. Decisions regarding water supply and waste water removal technologies, locations of wells and operating and maintenance systems are usually taken by men as well.

Gender – facets of the concept

Understanding the social roles of men and women in their socio-cultural and economic context.

Recognising and removing the causes for discrimination of women or men.

Promoting gender equality so that women and men are able to improve their living conditions.

Respecting the strategic interests of women and men in the meaning of human rights.

Where incomes of couples and families do not flow together but budgets are instead separated according to women and men, water prices and tariff systems are not gender neutral either. Women are often more willing to pay for improvements when they benefit from such improvements themselves, for instance by saving time fetching water or when their children fall ill less often.

Women also carry great responsibility in the household where the important aspect of family hygiene is concerned. It is a part of their role as a housewife or mother. They are in charge of determining how to store water, when to wash hands and what water should be used for what purposes.

Men and women have different organisational capacities. While women often have less free time, they are often more willing to take social responsibility than men - by assuming tasks involving the operation of standpipes, for example. Water does have a gender.



- **What about wastewater?**

Likewise! Because they usually carry more responsibility in the household, women are more involved than men in removing spent water as well as cleaning and emptying household toilets - if they have any.

In some countries inadequate school latrines prompt parents to refrain from enrolling their girls in schools out of suspicion and concern for their physical integrity. In the same way, the health risks posed by inadequate urban sanitation, which can be considerable, often affect women more than men.



- **What is more important: drinking water or gender equality?**

While gender equality in itself is a development objective, it is also an important success factor in projects of German Financial Cooperation (FC), and so it is in the water sector. This means that we explore and make use of the possibilities that are available for us to contribute to gender equality within the framework of drinking water and sanitation projects.

At the same time, in many Financial Cooperation programmes virtually nothing gets done without women. In order to improve rural water supply sustainably and cost-efficiently, women's knowledge of water resources, their interests and their willingness to cooperate in the projects need to be taken into account.

- **Taking a gender-specific approach in the water sector - what has to be considered?**

Positive gender impacts rarely occur automatically but must be actively integrated into project approaches.

However, the chances of being able to contribute to greater gender equality will differ depending on the project approach and the region. These chances are highest in regions where many people suffer from water-induced diseases, such as in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa.

Among other factors, involving the right persons in due time is crucial. In concrete terms this means taking women sufficiently into account right from the planning stage.

Yet in many areas the best trained (*male*) interviewers do not have any access to women's knowledge and views. Here it is essential to deploy well-trained *female* interviewers.

Any estimate of target group demand, which is an important basis for the planning of investments, becomes considerably more reliable if it takes into account the different needs of men and women.

Gender-differentiated approaches increase the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of FC projects in the water sector.

Where water prices are to be introduced or increased it is often useful to assess how income is distributed within the household and who is in charge of paying the water bill. The tariff system can then be structured in a way that does not increase the burden for poor women.

Many studies prove that combining measures aimed at improving water supply with campaigns designed to raise hygiene awareness and improve basic sanitation increases the likelihood of success. Effective hygiene education requires gender-appropriate design - so that men can be properly included as well.

In this context, care must be taken to distinguish between deliberately approaching women in the framework of water projects and clearly assessing what actually contributes to greater gender equality. In rural water supply projects there is a long tradition of calling upon women for volunteer work so that they will take responsibility for the management of the well sites. They are basically turned into unpaid charwomen. This has nothing to do with gender equality.

In rural water supply programmes or in cities where not everyone has access to water flowing from the tap in their house, people need to be recruited to take responsibility for the sale of drinking water at the standpipes. If this work is duly paid for it gives women a chance to earn

additional income. Official quotas for women can be helpful here.

Other effective measures are personnel support measures that empower women in the project area to influence decisions regarding water and to have a stronger representation in public decision-making bodies. Such measures can include training to help women become more articulate and courses aimed at strengthening their management and leadership skills. In many places it can also be a good idea to link up a water project with a component entitled "functional literacy" for women in order to give them access to important positions in the operation of the wells and standpipes. Illiterate women can hardly become treasurers.

The example of Tanzania - a water project improves gender relations

In Tanzania a water supply project has improved the health of 300,000 people. Instead of spending hours carrying water, women now lay out allotments as a means of feeding their families. As in other projects, too, they have equal representation with men on the user committee. In addition, spent water is used to irrigate the allotments, enabling them to achieve better yields – and often more income.

It is necessary to collect and maintain data during the planning stage so that it will be possible to assess the existing problems, the proposed solutions and the outcomes achieved with a project with regard to their implications for poor people, but also for men and women.

Projects in the water sector are usually directed at local, regional or national water supply or sanitation companies. These measures almost always challenge them considerably as they take place outside their core business area. This is usually the reason that it is not viable or reasonable to connect water projects with other tasks, such as the granting of micro-loans to female user groups or income-creating activities for women in completely different areas. It is a guiding principle of German Financial Cooperation not to overload projects in the water sector with activities that extend beyond them.

German Development Cooperation and, with it, KfW Entwicklungsbank face the challenge of addressing gender in the dialogue with the sector policymakers in the developing and transition countries. In other delicate topics such as cost-covering tariffs and poverty reduction we have already made significantly more progress.

• The example of Morocco - women involving women

In supplying rural areas with drinking water the Moroccan Government involves male and female users in the planning and operation of the facilities.



The objective of the FC-financed programme is to supply some 100,000 inhabitants in rural settlements in southern Morocco with drinking water year-round. The project measures include both the construction of new and the upgrading of existing drinking water supply systems. German FC also supports the Moroccan water authority in the areas of target group mobilisation, hygiene awareness, user groups and organisation of operation.

The water comes from deep wells and is pumped to standpipes or directly to the consumers through home connections. These systems are planned and financed with user participation to ensure that they both meet the needs of the population and are in line with their financial capacities. The main criteria for the selection of the villages to be included in the programme are sufficient water resources, the user groups' readiness to become organised and their financial participation. The technical and financial operation is ensured by the user groups.

In concrete terms, women are involved in the following ways:

- Women have a voice. A contract is entered into between the Moroccan water authority ONEP, the municipality and the relevant user group. The user group is responsible for the operation, maintenance and commercial management, such as determining the water tariff or preparing the annual budget for which

it hires technical and administrative personnel. A consultant provides the necessary training courses. Involving women in these decisions, functions and training courses strengthens their influence and improves their articulation skills. There is a rule that must be followed: at least 50% of the households must be represented by women in decision-making.

- Qualified women advise the population. As the water authority is currently unable to provide and pay an adequate number of female advisers they are being recruited by the consultant in the framework of the complementary measure. For women's interests to be taken into account in the planning and implementation of the programme it is quite essential that female professionals be deployed in the work with the population.
- Sanitary facilities are being built in schools because girls often drop out of school in the programme area for lack of separate toilets.
- Finally, women are receiving literacy training.

- **Are good water projects a feminist miracle weapon?**

Sometimes they are, but usually they are not. Water is important, but discrimination of women is characterised much more by their lack of access to education, land and capital. This means that we consider gender-differentiated water projects as contributing to greater gender equality - particularly in rural areas - but we are also aware of the limitations.

- **How many women at KfW Entwicklungsbank work in the water sector?**

We cannot claim that everything is perfect in our own house. One-third of the persons committed to the water sector at KfW Entwicklungsbank are women, and the trend is rising. However, we are not yet at 50%.

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