



The Gender Tool Box gathers knowledge material and method support on gender equality in the form of Tools, Briefs and Thematic Overviews.

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## [ BRIEF ]

# Women, Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

**There are strong linkages between access to water, sanitation and hygiene, and gender equality. A gender approach to water and sanitation services refers to assuring that all people, regardless of gender, benefit from, and are empowered by improved water and sanitation services, and hygiene practices. This guide gives a brief overview on why and how to consider gender aspects in water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) development projects and programmes.**

Due to cultural and historic reasons, women are often the primary collectors, transporters and users of water in developing countries. They tend to have the main responsibility for health, child care and are managers of domestic water as well as promoters of home and community-based sanitation activities. This division of labour generally results in women's and men's different priorities for water use and management. Yet, in many societies women's views are not systematically represented in decision-making bodies, and gender-based inequalities are often made invisible in debates and cultural norms. Women have accumulated knowledge about water resources, including location, quality and storage methods, as well as insights in common habits and problems within a community, which are important information for programming. Hence, women's active participation in water and sanitation solutions can improve health, improve status, increase women's safety, creating opportunities for income generation, as well as providing them with other public and influential roles.

Gender disparities are together with inadequate infrastructure, pollution of water sources, poor hygiene, and retrogressive cultural taboos such as those related to menstruation, impediments that need to be removed in order to ensure access and the right to safe water and adequate sanitation for women and men, girls and boys.

**Water supply:** Women play a central part in the provision, management and safeguarding of water. Women and girls spend significantly more time acquiring water than men and boys, as shown below in figure 1. Water collection can foster social cohesion and provide women with an opportunity to communicate with other women and people outside their homes. On the other hand, it is a heavy task that also can expose women to threats of violence and health hazards when they need to go far distance to collect water. Lack of access to water also decreases women's roles in contributions to agricultural production, food security and business opportunities.

**Sanitation and hygiene:** A focus on gender differences is of particular importance with regard to sanitation facilities. Inadequate access to sanitation and hygiene disproportionately affect poor women and girls, as they are often faced with additional challenges related to menstrual hygiene, personal safety, sexual harassments and violence. Without access to latrines, many women and girls become 'prisoners of daylight', using only the night as privacy. Night-time trips to fields or roadsides expose them to risk of physical attack and sexual violence. To ignore their natural bodily functions out of fear causes discomfort but also increases the risk of being affected by

health problems such as urinary tract infections, chronic constipation and mental stress. Furthermore, in many countries, school attendance by girls is lower and drop-out rates are significantly higher in schools that have no access to safe water and no separate toilet facilities for boys and girls.

### Issues to consider

- Improved water resources management, greater access to safe water and basic sanitation have clear linkages to improved human rights and a Human Rights Based Approach.
- Active participation of both men and women in the decision making of the type of water and sanitation service installed, as well as shared responsibility of managing the water and sanitation services, are important due their different roles and needs.
- Secure access to land for both men and women is essential for securing access to water, and for obtaining the resources to invest in future livelihoods.
- Training women and men in safe sanitation and hygiene practices within the household is a cost-effective way of raising awareness and skill.
- Multiple-use water projects tend to address women's needs more effectively, rather than one-dimensional projects.
- Improved access to toilets and water facilities in schools can increase girls' attendance in school.

**Conflict and emergency situations:** Conflicts and natural disasters that exacerbate water scarcity may lead to a double hardship for women. First of all, they may have to walk longer distance to collect water which is time-consuming and can expose them to danger. Secondly, due to security, cultural or social constraints women's mobility can be restricted which will decrease their access to water and adequate sanitation facilities even further.

Gender dynamics within households must be taken into account in situations of displacement when water and food are distributed. This includes men's and women's ability to access and equitably distribute relief items within households. Humanitarian interventions that radically alter gender roles, for example by giving women greater control over water distribution, may impact power dynamics negatively and can lead to increased gender-based violence.

### Issues to consider

- Women play a key role in the effectiveness of prevention, disaster relief, reconstruction and transformation.
- It is critical to understand the social and gender dynamics that could help or hinder aid effectiveness.

Women's vulnerability in disasters or conflicts can be decreased by working with barriers due to cultural and social constraints, such as women's mobility.

- In emergency interventions, it is essential to include a gender analysis in the needs assessment in order to provide appropriate WASH actions that are effective, safe and restores dignity for men and women.

### Policy process

- **Recognition of the importance of involving both women and men in the management of water and sanitation:** 1977 United Nations Water Conference, Mar del Plata; 1981-90 the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade.
- **Gender mainstreaming as a prerequisite for sustainable water management:** 1992 the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin.
- **Calls for women's participation and involvement in water-related development efforts:** Agenda 21 (paragraph 18.70f), and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation (paragraph 25). 2005-2015 the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Life'.
- **Highlight the close interlinkages between gender equality and women's empowerment:** 1992 the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).
- **Access to clean water and sanitation as a human right:** 2010 Resolution 64/292, the United Nations General Assembly.
- **The importance of empowering rural women as critical agents:** 2012 Rio +20 Outcome Document.

### ENTRY POINTS FOR SIDA

Recognising, understanding and addressing gender dimensions within water and sanitation projects promotes human rights and can lead to increased household welfare, improved health, increased gender equality and environmental sustainability. It also increases the efficiency and the effectiveness of the development resources invested. Sida has an important role to promote gender mainstreaming in water, sanitation and hygiene projects and programmes, and to support active participation of women in the planning, design, implementation, and monitoring of interventions targeting water and sanitation. Entry points for Sida can be identified within the following areas:

#### Mainstreaming gender at policy level

- Strengthen partner governments' capacity (judicial, legislative and executive) to promote the rights of women and to mainstream gender.

- Support that specific gender objectives are articulated within national water and sanitation policies and strategies.
- Support improved data management including sex-differentiated statistics and a more coherent monitoring at national (and global) levels that allows tracking the equality of services.
- Promote women's participation and representation in policy processes.
- Confirm whether national WASH strategies include access to water, sanitation and hygiene in schools, with emphasis on safe and well-maintained facilities separate for girls and boys.
- Support budget negotiation capacities at the water, sanitation and health sector ministries and agencies and promote the allocation of resources to actively enhance the rights of women in the area of WASH.
- Assess if national level stakeholders (government, donors, civil society, and research agencies) regularly incorporate gender considerations in studies, reviews or research commissioned to progress sector goals.

### Mainstreaming gender in operations

- Support gender sensitive participatory processes for project identification, design and implementation, operation and maintenance, and management (including active participation of communities, civil society and the private sector).
- In the decision of a contribution, request gender analysis to identify existing gender inequalities and the need to adjust interventions accordingly.
- Ensure that the implementing organisation has adequate gender competence to be able to mainstream gender in project implementation.
- Promote the allocation of sufficient resources to implement gender-sensitive strategies (e.g. access to in-

formation, participatory approaches, gender assessments, specially targeted projects) within service activities.

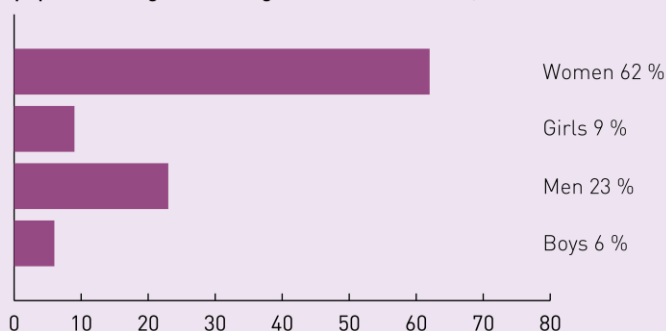
- Support studies that contributes to the understanding of the different roles and behaviour of women, men, girls and boys related to WASH, and find the most effective communication channels (including identification of spokespersons; teachers, community leaders, etc.), as well as the triggers for behavioural change.
- Support collection of sex-disaggregated information about WASH behaviour to help the private sector and development agencies to communicate more effectively, and to influence the adoption of safe sanitation and hygiene practices.
- Support interventions targeting women and girls to promote equality and reduce vulnerabilities.
- Support accountability mechanisms and meaningful participation in all phases of the water and sanitation services cycle.
- Support WASH initiatives that are sensitive to intra-household inequalities.
- Proactively work for gender analysis and mainstreaming to help clarify the specific and often different needs, vulnerabilities and coping-strategies of women and men in emergency situations.
- In emergencies, ensure that services are designed to reduce women's and children's time spent getting to, and from food and water distribution access points.

### Mainstreaming gender in monitoring and evaluation frameworks

- Incorporate indicators that accurately will monitor progress on water and sanitation in terms of gender, age, health-status, disability, sustainability, equity and regional variations.
- Support for adequate human resources and relevant

### Women bear the main burden for collecting water in sub-Saharan Africa

Distribution of the water collection burden among women, children under age 15 and men, in households without piped water on premises, sub-Saharan Africa, based on population-weighted averages from 25 countries, 2006–2009.



Source: The Millennium Development Goals Report 2012

Where water supplies are not readily accessible, water must be carried from its source. According to an analysis of data from 25 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, representing 48 per cent of the region's population, women and girls bear the primary responsibility for such water collection.

Only one quarter of the population in these countries had water on their premises in 2010. For the remaining 75 per cent, water had to be collected from some distance. The time and energy devoted to this manner of water collection is considerable, even under the most conservative assumption of only one trip per day. For the 25 countries combined, it is estimated that women spend at least 16 million hours each day per round trip, men spend 6 million hours and children 4 million hours.

funding are allocated by agencies to address gender in the monitoring of the water, sanitation and hygiene services project cycle.

- Document lessons learnt regarding implementation of specific gender equality objectives.

### Strengthening the voice of women and men

- Support activities that train and empower women to exercise their rights and take active part in decision-making.
- Ensure that women and men are given equal attention in the promotion of WASH and training activities.
- Identify key opinion leaders in a community that can promote hygiene and safe water management to both women and men (teachers, principals, community leaders, etc.).
- Make sure that sector meetings at community level are organized to overcome cultural barriers to women's participation (cultural norms, seating arrangements, language, and meeting times, etc.).
- Promote that operational agencies provide information for decision making on policies, strategies, plans and investments in a format that is user-friendly and accessible to women, marginalized groups and the organizations that represent them.
- Emphasize the relevance of integrating boys and adult men's contribution for gender equality, affirm men's capacity for change, and support their individual and collective efforts for positive change.
- Support feedback mechanisms for complaints and make sure that policy makers and regulatory bodies make use of this feedback.
- Assess if service providers utilize tools like citizens' charters, ICT, and user-friendly formats that are accessible to women, marginalized groups and the organizations that represent them.

### FURTHER READING

**Aqua know:** [Women in water supply and sanitation services \(WS&S\) and agriculture](#)

**Cap-Net:** [Why gender matters](#)

**Gendered Innovations Stanford University:** [Gendered Innovations in Science, Health & Medicine, Engineering and Environment](#)

**IASC, Inter-agency Standing Committee:** [Gender Handbook in Humanitarian Action](#)

**Sida:** [Sanitation for improved lives of Women and Children](#)  
[The Gender and Water Alliance](#)

**The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council:** [Gender and WASH](#)

**The Water and Sanitation Program:** [Mainstreaming Gender in Water and Sanitation](#)

**UNDP:** [Why does 'gender' matter to a water manager?](#)

**UN-Water:** Policy brief – [Gender, Water and Sanitation](#)

**Community-Led Total Sanitation:** [Gender based violence and sanitation, hygiene and water](#)

**Unilever, Wateraid & the WSSCC:** [We can't wait](#) – A report on sanitation and hygiene for women and girls

### Example of indicators

- **Proportion of population (women and men) using:**
  - **basic drinking water supply**<sup>1</sup>
  - **adequate sanitation**<sup>2</sup>
  - **basic hand-washing facilities at home**

(Impact level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **Share of primary schools with access to separate toilets for girls and boys.** (Outcome level indicator, measures capacity development as a prerequisite)
- **Time spent (women/men) collecting water and firewood.** (Outcome level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **Share of women and men participating in initiating, siting, implementing, using, and in operation and maintenance of WASH facilities.** (Output level indicator, measures capacity development as prerequisite)
- **Time saved by women and men using improved water and sanitation service.** (Outcome level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **Share of national budget allocated to water supply; sanitation; and hygiene.** (Outcome level indicator, measures political will)
- **Number of additional women and men using a basic water supply/ adequate sanitation/basic hand-washing facility as result of Swedish support.** (Output level indicator, measures effect on target group)
- **The existence of gender specific objectives in WASH.** (Output level indicator, measures political will)

<sup>1</sup> JMP pre-2015 definition of "improved water source" and with a total collection time of less than 30 minutes (round-trip)

<sup>2</sup> JMP pre-2015 definition of "improved sanitation" and with less than 30 people sharing toilet people sharing toilet.



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