



## Reinforcing gender equity

### Context

Women constitute two-thirds of the 1.2 billion poor people in the world. The great majority live in rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, regions that are also home to most of the world's 'water poor' – those with limited access to reliable, safe supplies of water for productive and domestic uses. The role women play in reducing food insecurity and poverty – through their knowledge of multiple uses of water, crop production, local biodiversity, soils and local water resources – is recognized internationally. However, despite this, they are often still excluded from decision-making processes in new water management approaches and other natural resource allocation projects and initiatives.

Globalization, changing market dynamics and climate change are altering the rural context for most poor rural people, resulting in increased vulnerability to natural hazards and economic uncertainties, above all for women. These problems are compounded by the increasing feminization of agriculture, in particular in SSA, as a result of migration by men and the loss of social capital due to the HIV/AIDS pandemic. However, a part of the 'feminization of agriculture' in Southern Africa, where women have always been active in crop cultivation, is due to the increased visibility and acknowledgement of their roles as heads of households and farm managers. Thus, now more than ever, women's secure access to water for both productive and domestic uses is critical in reducing poverty and in achieving improved rural livelihoods.

IFAD strives to target poor people and groups through a gender-sensitive poverty and livelihood approach that incorporates the concerns and priorities of poor women and men in water-related projects. However, the meaningful involvement of women and men from disadvantaged groups in such projects remains a challenge that the organization seeks to overcome through a multiple-use service (MUS)<sup>1</sup> approach, with gender equity at its core.

<sup>1</sup> The multiple-use service (MUS) approach takes people's multiple water needs as the starting point in designing integrated water services, rather than providing water only for productive or only for domestic use (van Koppen, Moriarty and Boelee 2006).

## Main challenges

### Institutional constraints

- Rural development initiatives and projects often overlook the role of women as water and livelihood managers and decision makers. This yields inadequate gender strategies, which in turn exacerbate inequities in resource allocation and women's access to water.
- Gender-neutral or gender-biased project design and implementation are often based on a lack of understanding of water-related livelihoods and gender power dynamics.
- Membership restrictions in water user associations (WUAs) that favour landowners and full-time farmers, who are often men, mean that the concerns and preferences of poor, often landless men and women regarding water allocation and distribution and the management of multiple water uses are not duly considered.
- MUS concepts are emerging only slowly, due to the embeddedness of varying water approaches in diverse institutions and regulatory/legal frameworks.
- Prevailing social and cultural norms inhibit women from taking up public roles or leadership positions.
- Low institutional documentation and monitoring of waterborne diseases and HIV/AIDS incidence following water-related construction places additional burdens on women of all age groups.

### Access to resources and services

- Access to water for productive use in general and for irrigation in particular is almost always linked to access to land and land tenure. Often, women cannot obtain the financial services, credit and collateral they need to benefit fully from water projects.
- Customary and sometimes formal law do not always allow women to have access to and control over land, water and other productive resources (such as credit or fertilizer). Widows and orphans are particularly disadvantaged.
- Information regarding project activities and services is often not available to men and women from disadvantaged groups.
- Single-use water projects, focusing on either domestic water supply or irrigation, do not address the needs of communities sufficiently. This is particularly true for women, who are mainly concerned with water supply for

drinking and other domestic purposes, kitchen gardens and small-scale irrigation.

- Insufficient consultation with actual users and communities results in the construction of water and sanitation facilities (such as community taps, small water tanks for domestic use, and latrines) that are often inappropriately located for women.

### Capacity issues

- One of the major factors hindering women's participation in water and irrigation projects is their low level of literacy, resulting in a lack of skills relevant to participation and often low self-confidence.
- Funds available for conducting training and capacity development programmes for beneficiaries and project staff are inadequate.
- Rural women often undervalue their knowledge and capabilities and thus do not volunteer to participate in irrigation water projects, even though the projects may interest them. Moreover, due to their already high workload and responsibilities (domestic and productive), women often have limited time for project activities.
- Project staff involved in establishing WUAs often lack awareness of gender issues.
- HIV/AIDS and waterborne diseases result in loss of social capital and productive resources (such as land, water, labour, technology, credit, knowledge and status), and usually result in a higher workload for women.

### IFAD approaches

Intersectoral management is a relatively new, holistic approach that offers a promising framework for better understanding and pro-poor mobilization of potential development synergies. In IFAD's approach to water, this theme is not central, but is considered a holistic element in strengthening poor rural people's livelihoods and resilience. IFAD investment approaches to water-related interface management take into account the country-specific structures of the rural political economy. In so doing, they support the development of pro-poor, community-based natural resource management (NRM) institutions, which in turn improve farmer-led agriculture, natural resource technologies, and the sharing of knowledge of these achievements.

With regard to gender and water, by creating the necessary enabling environment and using

appropriate tools, IFAD seeks to ensure that rural men and women participate in project activities and reap project benefits on an equitable basis.

### **Institutional approaches**

- Foster higher participation of women and disadvantaged groups in water projects and WUAs, particularly women from poor families and woman-headed households (e.g. as was done in the Gambia, Ghana and the United Republic of Tanzania).
- Promote gender sensitivity in every phase of the project cycle, including design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.
- Strengthen community-based management of water resources and partnerships among multiple water uses and users through institutional and capacity development (e.g. in Ghana).
- Enhance overall project direction through intensified supervision and implementation support and through awareness-raising and capacity-development training in gender issues for project and line agency staff (e.g. in the United Republic of Tanzania and Zambia).

### **Technical approaches**

- Endorse and promote the MUS approach focusing on multiple water use requirements (e.g. in Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania ), which addresses women's concerns better than single-use irrigation projects do.
- Develop the capacity of poor women and men farmers in technical issues related to irrigation and cultivation practices (e.g. in the Gambia and Peru).
- Promote women's ownership of appropriate technologies and innovations (e.g. small irrigation units in Malawi and Namibia, zigzag furrow irrigation in Peru, or treadle pumps) in which gender-sensitive ergonomics are used to reduce irrigation time, leaving men and women more time for other activities.
- Ensure the appropriate location of infrastructure constructed to meet rural women's water use and sanitation needs, such as separate toilets, communal water taps and other facilities (e.g. in Kenya).
- Develop and promote gender monitoring and evaluation indicators for the various components and activities of projects and programmes. Ensure that all indicators and information on beneficiary-targeted actions are broken down by gender.

### **Investment approaches**

- Strengthen women's access rights to land and water through allocation of irrigated land (e.g. land-for-labour agreements in the Gambia) and long-term leaseholds (e.g. in Bangladesh).
- Use public and community funds for demand-driven, multiple-use water systems to improve livelihoods and enhance equality in the distribution of benefits among men and women.
- Develop the capacities of women and men from disadvantaged groups in issues related to water resource management, and provide training on other aspects – leadership, entrepreneurship, credit management – that help them reap the full benefits of water and other development projects (e.g. in Bangladesh and the United Republic of Tanzania).
- Strengthen partnerships with other donors and projects in order to empower women and women's groups to access credit and grants (e.g. in Zambia).
- Improve documentation and knowledge management of the processes and catalysts that lead to successful participation of women in water projects and show how this participation actually improves their livelihoods.

## IFAD case study

# United Republic of Tanzania: Participatory Irrigation Development Programme (1999-2007)

This IFAD-supported programme targeted some of the main challenges regarding gender and water, particularly women's participation in WUAs and the provision of water supply schemes for multiple uses.

### Approach

- The programme sought to address rural poverty through sustainable development, adopting a community-based resource management approach that incorporated participatory design methods. It encouraged farmers, both men and women, to take responsibility for irrigation development so that schemes reflected their needs and not those of planners.
- The MUS approach was followed, with the aim of reducing drudgery and providing women with more time for other, more productive livelihood activities.
- The programme hired a gender and targeting officer to facilitate the targeting of women beneficiaries.

### Water/gender-related activities

Apart from involving women in all activities, the programme undertook the following gender-specific activities:

- Building water supply schemes for multiple uses, other than irrigation, in order to address women's concerns about water availability for domestic use. Constructing shallow tubewell schemes to provide water for horticultural crops, rice seedling nurseries and domestic use. The schemes aimed particularly at lessening workloads by reducing the time women spent fetching water for domestic use.

- Introducing labour-saving technologies, such as fuel-saving stoves and weeders, to alleviate women's burdens and save time. This enabled women to engage in community activities.
- Fixing a minimum 50 per cent quota for women in the food-for-work component of the programme, which was funded and implemented by the World Food Programme (WFP) – initially for the market-access roads component and later for the component on excavation of canals and drains.
- Providing ready-to-consume food as family rations (for five people), which helped women spend more time on productive and income-generating activities.

### Results

- Enhanced productivity of crops, particularly rice, led to improved food security, partly due to early implementation of the MUS concept.
- Reduced drudgery resulted in more time for women's productive and income-generating activities.
- The proportion of women with plots and membership in WUAs at the time of evaluation was estimated to be over 30 per cent. Some women also took up leadership roles in WUAs and district councils and participated in credit associations.
- Livelihoods of programme beneficiaries improved in general, and of women in particular, through increased income, access to credit, enhanced food security and general well-being.

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## Additional information

### Further reading

FAO. 2003. *Dry taps: Gender and poverty in water resources management*, by Eva Rathgeber. Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

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IFAD. 2007a. *Guidelines for incorporating the gender approach into rural development projects*. Rome.

IFAD. 2007b. *Gender and water. Securing water for improved livelihoods: The multiple-use system approach*. Rome.

IWMI. 2007. *Water for food, water for life: A comprehensive assessment of water management in agriculture*, by D. Molden. London: Earthscan; and Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Water Management Institute.

Van Koppen, B. 2002. A gender performance indicator for irrigation: Concepts, tools and applications. Research Report 59. Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Water Management Institute.

Van Koppen, B., P. Moriarty and E. Boelee. 2006. Multiple-use water services to advance the Millennium Development Goals. Research Report 98. Colombo, Sri Lanka: International Water Management Institute.

### Useful partner websites

FAO gender group

[www.fao.org/gender/](http://www.fao.org/gender/)

Comprehensive Assessment of Water Management in Agriculture

[www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Assessment/Synthesis/poverty.htm](http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/Assessment/Synthesis/poverty.htm)

Gender and Water Alliance

[www.genderandwater.org/](http://www.genderandwater.org/)

International Water Management Institute (IWMI)

[www.iwmi.cgiar.org](http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org)