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ACCESS TO SANITATION AND SAFE WATER: GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS AND LOCAL ACTIONS

Community participation in rural water supply and sanitation projects, gender roles and realities: A case of Ward 22 in Chipinge district, Manicaland province, Zimbabwe

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This paper shows how addressing gender in water supply and sanitation projects can improve the well being of society at large. The study was carried out in Ward 22, Chipinge district in Manicaland province, Zimbabwe. Interviews and group discussions were held with community people, Rural District Council personnel and UNICEF personnel. Community-based Management of water supply and sanitation in the Ward was a success because of the meaningful contribution of both men and women. This led to empowerment of women, effectiveness and efficiency, increased coverage, community development among other positive impacts. This paper concludes that meaningful participation of both gender groups in community water supply projects is quite pivotal in ensuring effective development and should be encouraged at all levels.

Introduction

In rural Zimbabwe, like many other rural areas in the developing world, women and children, especially the girl child are the hardest hit by inadequate water supply and sanitation facilities. Poor women, particularly the poorest of the poor are generally more vulnerable to poverty and if there are no adequate water supplies, they have fewer opportunities to escape the cycle of poverty. Availability of reliable water supplies means women can engage in small-scale productive uses of water such as back yard gardening, livestock watering, beer brewing and this enhances their livelihood options by making significant contribution to household income, food security, improved nutrition and health. Following Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, there were huge investments in the water and sanitation sector. This was evidenced by the influx of donors and the launch of the Integrated Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme (IRWSSP). Despite these huge investments, around late 80s, it was quite evident that a considerable proportion of water supply and sanitation facilities were no longer in use. Sector reviews were carried out and they revealed that the supply-driven approach used resulted in failure to meet communities' water and sanitation needs.

In recognition of the huge costs to society of poor health as a direct result of unreliable water supply and inadequate sanitation, the government implemented a strategy to decentralize services to local governments. Community-based Management (CBM) programme for water supply and sanitation was launched. Pilot projects were carried out in Chivi district in Masvingo province and were later extended to other districts countrywide in 1994-1997. Women's participation in rural water supply and sanitation projects was also encouraged in line with global trends and given the critical links between gender, water and sanitation.

In line with government strategies, in 1997, Chipinge district adopted the CBM. All donor agencies used the Rural District Council (RDC) as the entry point for their operations. This represented a significant shift from a situation where communities used to be recipients of development to one where they were also part and parcel of development with gender mainstreaming as the integral part of the shift.

Methods and materials

Contacts were made with UNICEF personnel who have been working in the district. Together with UNICEF personnel, a visit was made to the district. Discussions were held with the district Chief Executive Officer, the Water Supply and Sanitation Sub-Committee and with other RDC personnel. After explaining the purpose of our visit, the Water Supply and Sanitation Sub-Committee identified Ward 22 as a case study, which shows the success of gender mainstreaming in water supply and sanitation. At community level, discussions were held with the Ward Councillor, Water Point Committee members, Water Pump Minders and Village Health

Workers. During group discussion, community members were grouped according to sex. Women groups revealed that they had previously been marginalized. The discussions also revealed how women felt about their involvement in water supply and sanitation projects in their communities.

Both men and women lamented that in the past their problems were mainly a result of the technical expertise that was previously being used in the design of water supply systems. They explained that water service providers failed to meet their actual water needs due to lack of meaningful consultation with all member groups of the community. As such, they only met communities' perceived water needs. Visits were also made to community water supply infrastructure. At household level, the existence of sanitation facilities was also examined.

Water uses, gender roles and realities

In Ward 22, water is used for a mix of domestic (drinking, cooking, washing, sanitation, etc) as well as for small-scale productive activities such as; back yard gardening, livestock watering, dairy, piggery, poultry, brick making and beer brewing among other small-scale productive uses. However, most of the water supply projects primarily focused on providing clean water for domestic use from communal boreholes and deep wells with boreholes (Robinson et al., 2004). The view that provision and improvement of domestic water supplies is largely a public health benefit has even persisted beyond the 1980s where international agencies also continued to focus on clean drinking water and adequate sanitation (Makoni et al., 2004). The focus on provision of water to enhance rural livelihood options was absent in these programmes (Katsi et al., 2007).

In Ward 22, it was evident that water use has gender dimensions. Women were very much concerned about water for domestic uses and small-scale productive uses. Men were interested in water for productive uses. Most men were mainly interested in growing sugarcane and cotton and moulding bricks for sale. Gardening was the most popular household activity for women. Women also cited Beer brewing as a common practice. Men in some cases, could help in fetching firewood for brewing the opaque stuff.

Best practices in Ward 22

In 2003, the Chipinge RDC received a donation of US\$4000-00 from the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for the rehabilitation of water supply infrastructure, mainly boreholes that have long been abandoned. The RDC, in line with the CBM concept, targeted the funds for community mobilization, training workshops and training of local well sinkers and headwork builders in Ward 22. In consultation with the Ward Councillor and village traditional authorities, women were identified as key beneficiaries to receive training in water supply facilities operations and maintenance, since many men who had received training in earlier programmes had left their villages to take up better paying jobs. Some had also crossed into Mozambique. Some were also reported to have relocated. Those who were still present were not always available to take up their responsibilities when there was need and they were reported to be spending much of their time on drinking sprees. As such, it was the women and the girl child who suffered most in times of water shortages during system breakdowns. Against this backdrop, the district Water Supply and Sanitation Sub-Committee, they saw it fit enough to train women. Those men who wanted to participate were also considered.

To strengthen the capacity of personnel at district level to support communities in water supply and sanitation issues, the head of Community Services Section (CSS) had attended refresher courses at the Institute of Water and Sanitation Development in Harare. UNICEF personnel helped with the training. According to the RDC personnel, this training was a revival of CBM, which had ceased to function due to lack of financial resources.

During the first days of training, there was resistance from male-headed households. The husbands felt threatened and were not happy with the involvement of their wives in the whole process. After realizing that some women were no longer attending training sessions and meetings, UNICEF together with the RDC held an awareness-raising workshop in the Ward, outlining the benefits of training both men and women. After this, women numbers increased dramatically. Even some household mothers who had not volunteered in the first place started to show their interest and willingness to participate.

Women were subsequently trained to ensure prompt repairs and proper maintenance of boreholes. They also received skills in latrine building; pump maintenance and handling of tools. Despite the fact that these were non-traditional roles of women, it was apparent that men accepted this change as they demonstrated a keen interest in assisting with other household tasks while their wives were attending community-related meetings and workshops. However, after training, there arose another problem, the long traditional dress

for Zimbabwean women inhibited them to work as latrine builders. The dressing, which they were given after training (work suits and overalls) were considered to be inappropriate in their cultural setting. In some households, men took the overalls and the work suits and made them their clothes. After repeated workshops and awareness campaigns, men understood the idea behind this kind of dressing and women were allowed to wear their work suits when at work.

Planning, technology selection and site selection for new water points, as well as upgrading and rehabilitating existing infrastructure are jobs that are increasingly based on both men and women's involvement. Once the women were able to be involved, they found out that they had increased power and recognition. However, they also realized that their workload increased significantly. A meeting was convened by the Ward Councillor to discuss the work of the women and how men can lessen the burden. Men agreed to help decrease the women's work load by taking up responsibility for protecting water points from animals by fencing and putting cement around some deep wells. At village level, women devised a collective roster in which they assigned water and sanitation duties and tasks to each household for designated water points. Among some of the agreed upon duties, this included regular cleaning and clearing of open drains to curb water logging to prevent mosquito breeding.

From small-scale productive uses of water, women established savings and credit clubs, with some male members included. They also set up a revolving fund to buy locally available spare parts and greasing materials for boreholes. Women also established community gardens. Men were asked to fund village projects when required and there was no resistance. Much of the success in Ward 22 was attributed to their dedicated Councillor (female), who also sits on various community and district boards. Her husband, a headmaster is very supportive and very happy with the way his wife is executing community duties. The power of traditional leaders is well respected in this Ward and this also points to the success of community projects because they would be called from time to time to solve disputes if some community members did not meet their obligations.

Apart from UNICEF and the RDC, the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare was also instrumental in training Village Health Educators and the Village Health Workers, who had the task of disseminating education on health and hygiene-related information. In villages, this has resulted in the formation of health clubs and other community-led initiatives. Although Village Health Workers indicated their commitment to work for their communities, they lamented that their monthly allowances from the government were so paltry and they consider this as a mockery. UNICEF personnel attributed the success of water supply and sanitation projects in Ward 22 to effective community leadership.

Outcomes

Women empowerment

- Women's contributions were recognized and their role as custodians and effective managers of water resources was strengthened.
- Women's self-confidence as effective agents of change got a boost.
- Women have taken on what were traditionally male-perceived societal roles and responsibilities.

Effectiveness and efficiency

- Due to the newly acquired knowledge and skills, women pump mechanics and the pump minders are now able to make prompt repairs and rehabilitation of water points, something which would take weeks and months when this used to be men's responsibility alone.
- Women's work is voluntary and this costs significantly less than hiring an external person.

Increased coverage

- Funds donated by UNICEF were targeted at rehabilitating 15 boreholes. However, with women's effective participation, it was possible to rehabilitate 60 boreholes.

Increased time

- Water points are now strategically located to cater for all households within a walking distance, serving women and the girl child from all their time and energy spend traveling to fetch water from far away sources. Time served as a result of proximity of water sources means that in many households mothers spend more time with their children, improving the quality of care to their families. For children, they no longer walk longer distances to fetch water; this frees their time to concentrate on schoolwork.

- Women have increased time for small-scale productive activities, which gives them income and improves their nutritional base.
- With their husbands, they eke out a living through moulding bricks for sale with part of these earnings used to pay school fees for their children and purchasing of other family necessities.
- Women have increased time to train in other income generating ventures such as tie and dye production, pottery, weaving and forging of ploughs and other farming equipment.

Community development

- The adoption of CBM has significantly reduced the community's dependency syndrome.
- Women charge interest of 30% on loans from their savings and credit clubs. The interest is ploughed back to assist in:
 - Replacement of borehole leather cups
 - Collective sending of children to schools
 - Stock up on non-perishable groceries for use during festive seasons
- Some villages in the Ward have formed burial societies, school development committees and many other joint venture projects
- The skills and knowledge acquired in building women's capacity to manage their own water supply and sanitation facilities further stimulated other community-led developments. With the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare, village groups were trained as Ward Care Supporters. Their role is to collect and disseminate information on health-related issues from households to support home-based AIDS groups, and also help in nursing village AIDS patients. These village structures are now also used as entry points by other non-governmental organizations for their community operations.

Better hygiene

- Access to convenient and reliable water supply led to the formation of health clubs, which in turn led to community-initiated sanitary facility project and significant changes in hygiene behaviour for example in Manzvire village.

Improved health

- The microbiological quality of water in the Ward shows that the water was generally safe for human consumption. According to the District Principal Environmental Health Technician, 85% of the tested water points were found to be within the WHO drinking water quality guidelines.
- There was also a significant decrease of diarrhoeal disease in the Ward. Records kept at Manzvire clinic indicated that fewer reported cases of diarrhoea were an indication of improved hygiene.

Role model ward

- In late 2004, UNICEF prepared a documentary on the Community-based Management programme and gender mainstreaming approach used in Ward 22. This documentary will be used to train other communities within Zimbabwe and beyond.
- 16 community members from a selected village (Manzvire) were sponsored to attend regional Water, Resources, Sanitation and Hygiene (WARSH) Fair, September, 2004 held at the Harare International Conference Centre, Harare, Zimbabwe. Those who were selected attended to share their best practices with other communities. They did this through drama, dances and songs, which mirrored their themes. Their participation at the regional fair also offered them an opportunity to discussions with a wide range of sector professionals from Africa and beyond. This was also an opportunity for practitioners, policy makers, academics and researchers from a wide range of disciplines to ask questions and put suggestions.

Conclusion

As evidenced by Ward 22, gender mainstreaming is not about numbers but it seeks to take into account the needs and interests of both men and women in development projects. In some communities, although it is not easy for men to accept that women can equally contribute to operation and maintenance of water supply and sanitation facilities, it needs to be appreciated that accepting this change is not something which can be achieved overnight. It's a slowly but surely process, which external agents should accept. This might slow down the pace of projects as intended but will eventually come to be a success. Communities are not

homogenous. As such, cultural and context specific strategies should be observed and apply strategies accordingly.

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