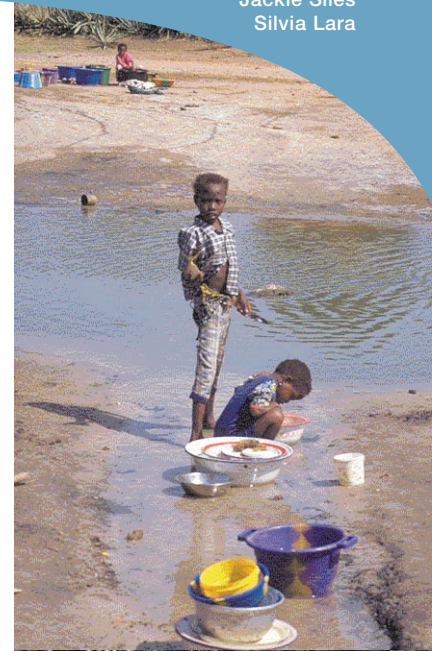


Gender Makes the Difference

- Water is a finite and valuable resource, whose use should be guided by economic efficiency, equity, and access for all. In addition to supporting human life, water preserves the sustainability and vitality of diverse ecosystems around the world. Only 3% of the planet's water is freshwater and available for human use. People appropriate water to supply their homes, produce food, and carry out industrial activities. The impact of these uses on water quantity and quality has affected both natural systems and human health.
- In many developing countries, women and children walk longer distances to secure clean water when water sources are contaminated or reduced by humans, animals, or natural hazards such as drought. Some 30% of women in Egypt walk over an hour a day to meet water needs. In some parts of Africa, women and children spend eight hours a day collecting water.
- Inadequate water access and poor water quality affect women's crop and livestock production, increase their work to collect, store, protect, and distribute water, and impact women's health and that of their families. Millions of poor are affected every year by all types of water-related diseases, especially water- and vector-borne diseases. Women often care for the people who are ill from malaria, schistosomiasis, and diarrhea, and assume the additional labor that the sick can no longer perform.
- As the traditional water bearers and custodians of family health, women shoulder a huge burden in coping with the lack of basic sanitation services. The lack of sanitation facilities has different impacts on women than men. For example, sometimes cash subsidies for latrines given to men are used for other purposes, since latrines are a bigger priority for women than they are for men.
- Water projects often favor men's uses of irrigated water. Frequently, planners document only women's domestic water needs (washing, food preparation, cleaning, etc.) but overlook how women use water in farming, raising animals, and producing market goods.
- Women's entitlement to water in developing countries is often precarious. Because many rural women depend on small-scale or hand irrigation, they can have extreme difficulties coping with drought. Other times, the technologies available to women are unsuitable, such as pumps that have handles they cannot reach or manipulate, or that the women have not been trained to repair.
- Legal constraints can affect women's rights to control water resources. In Kenya, the Mwea Irrigation Scheme appropriated all available land, investing control in the hands of male managers. Women lost rights to land they had traditionally used to grow subsistence food crops. Consequently, they became more dependent on men and were forced to turn to their husbands to buy food.



FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:

Capacity Building Network for Integrated Water Resources Management
www.cap-net.org

FAO
www.fao.org

IUCN-Gender and Environment
www.genderandenvironment.org

Gender and Water Alliance
www.genderandwateralliance.org

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- Unanticipated effects of environmental initiatives can sometimes benefit women. In a community in India, irrigation contributed to the growth of weeds. This was beneficial for women of landholding families, as the increased fodder enabled them to increase milk and ghee production.
- The privatization of water services in many cities and regions in the world has been tied to loan conditions, structural adjustment programs, poverty reduction strategies and international development assistance. In many instances, privatization has led to large hikes in water bills, cessation of water supplies, additional health problems, greater corruption, and further hardship for poor women and their families.

Women in developing countries are most often the collectors, users, and managers of water in the household and on the farm. Domestic water is used for processing and preparing food; for drinking, bathing, and washing; for irrigating home gardens and watering livestock. Women recycle water, often reusing water for washing and irrigation.

Women have considerable knowledge about water resources, including water quality and reliability, and are key to the success of water resources development and protection. Yet women's knowledge and role in water resource management is still largely unrecognized, and social and economic norms often reinforce unequal participation and decision-making in community organizations such as water users' associations.

WHY GENDER MAKES A DIFFERENCE IN WATER MANAGEMENT

- When women's and men's roles are considered in the use, supply, administration, and conservation of water resources, the links between people and the natural resources they depend upon become clearer.
- Women are active players and leaders in the struggle for safe, affordable and accessible drinking water. Women can, and do, make a difference in watershed and irrigation management, in water sanitation, and in safeguarding water resources. Projects and programs that neglect indigenous management and treat women as beneficiaries and users, rather than water managers and decision-makers, hamper project outcomes and diminish women's position.
- Taking gender issues into consideration allows for a better understanding of the entire hydrological cycle and the interaction of water with other natural and socio-economic systems. Increased gender awareness in water resource management can foster greater participation, collaboration, and consensus.
- A thorough, gender-based analysis of local situations helps to create more effective, equitable, and sustainable water policies and programs.
- Greater gender awareness contributes to a more balanced representation of women and men in decision-making, and ensures that women's perspectives are voiced. In the Dominican Republic, for example, a National Water Authority regulation requires that at least 40% of the Water Committee members be women.
- Collecting sex-disaggregated information is a first step toward developing gender-responsive policies and programs. Data that provide information on women's and men's resources use, access to resources and participation in environmental decision-making contributes to sound policies.

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