

WATER INTEGRITY IS A WOMAN'S ISSUE

'Women and the poor are most often the main victims of corruption in water governance.'

Huguette Labelle (TI, 2008)

Corruption in the water sector affects women and girls on many levels and yet the link between integrity, gender and water is not sufficiently recognized. A study by the UNDP showed that grassroots women suffer more than men from the impact of corruption (UNDP, 2012) and have a broader understanding of the issues in relation to water. They include women being excluded in decision-making around water (and thus deprioritized when it comes to service delivery); women and girls doing the majority of water collection; women and girls suffering sexual harassment and exploitation; and, finally, their lack of access to key resources such as land and water.

DECISION-MAKING AND SERVICE DELIVERY

Despite the prominence of roles for women in the water sector, they are rarely consulted about the provision and delivery of water services, and women's needs for water for families or for irrigation are often given a low priority by water managers and decision-makers – a failure of integrity (Cap-Net and GWA, 2014). For example, service failures affect women from a young age. Toilets for girls in schools are not prioritized, with the result that they may stay away from school when menstruating (van der Gaag, 2010). And women are often the ones who have to pay for water, whether this is an above-board user fee or a bribe, even though their income is often lower than men's (Cap-Net and GWA, 2014).

WOMEN AND WATER COLLECTION

Women are the main collectors and managers of water for the household. Women and girls bear the majority of the burden of water collection in many parts of the world, especially in Africa and rural Asia.¹ In Africa, 90 per cent of the work of gathering water and wood is done by women.

Water collection leaves women and girls less time for other activities, including income generation, studying and participating in decision-making or leisure, and it has proved to have detrimental health effects (Evans et al., 2013; Geere et al., 2010). In Tanzania, a survey found school attendance to be 12 per cent higher for girls living 15 minutes or less from a water source than for girls whose homes were an hour or more away (Redhouse, 2004). Attendance rates for boys appear to be far less affected.²

Women may be threatened or attacked when making the long journey to fetch water, or the shorter journey at night to find a private place to relieve themselves. Water providers may demand sex as a 'bribe' for providing services (known as 'sextortion'). However, sextortion is neither recognized in the main international conventions nor monitored in international surveys. Therefore, it remains a hidden (and contentious) form of corruption. It is also one that affects women and girls disproportionately (UNDP, 2012).

LAND AND RESOURCES

Women own only 2 per cent of the world's private land, and even when they have a legal title they are often prevented from accessing its resources. Water rights, including access to official irrigation systems, are linked to land rights. Although women's involvement in subsistence farming is key to feeding entire families, they often have little or no access to irrigation to grow the food they need (Cap-Net and GWA, 2014).

In 2010 UN-Habitat and the Italian NGO YAKU started a collaboration to answer the demand for

¹ UN-Water: www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/gender.shtml.

² Ibid.

a sewer system and water treatment plant in Villa Satélite, a peri-urban town in Bolivia. From the outset the project aimed to introduce the cross-sectional approach on the gender perspective. The project worked with technical professionals and local communities to raise awareness about the importance of taking women's opinions into account. Common meetings were held for both men and women to discuss the project, but in addition women-only spaces were organized, for them to gather their concerns, needs and suggestions and to boost their confidence. The project managed to incorporate women at the same level as men in the decision-making process, address some of their main concerns (such as toilets inside the house, for safety reasons) and set up the basis for female participation in future projects (Cap-Net and GWA, 2014; UN-HABITAT and GWA, 2013).

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE?

The water needs of women and girls are explicitly mentioned in Goal 6.2 of the current Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as are their access to economic resources, basic services, ownership and control over land and other forms of property, inheritance, natural resources, appropriate new technology and financial services (Goal 1.4). Moreover, women's 'full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life' are mentioned in Goal 5.5.³

A number of international organizations, among which are the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA)⁴ and the Women for Water Partnership,⁵ have been working on these issues for years, and at local level women's self-help groups play a key role in water management, many of them heavily engaged in the fight against corruption and devising innovative strategies for increased accountability and transparency. Women's skills and knowledge are key for the effective and efficient management of water and there can be no integrity without full participation by women in decision-making. Many institutions need to review their policies and procedures in this light.

- + Promote gender budgeting in the water ministry and other institutions as one way of tracking the expenditure of funds on initiatives that are relevant to women, especially poor women.
- + Ensure that projects and programmes, whether public or private, begin with a gender analysis, understanding how labour is divided and valued and disaggregating data by sex.
- + Analyse how activities, decisions and plans affect women differently from men, and boys differently from girls.
- + As part of integrity development, involve women in planning water for livelihoods; they bring a new perspective on the value of water in promoting small-scale enterprises and agriculture that can lift people out of poverty.
- + Understand that hygienic sanitation for women is an issue of safety and dignity, and therefore one of integrity.
- + Provide gender-targeted programmes, involving women as well as men in development projects, including water system infrastructure and operation and maintenance.
- + Raise the understanding of government workers about the negative societal consequences of corruption in the water sector and the impact on women in particular. Train technical and managerial personnel and raise their capacity in gender participation, analysis and methods.
- + Recognize sextortion as a specific form of corruption, in legislation, monitoring and integrity initiatives.
- + Support women's grass-roots organizations, for example with training in the technical details of water management, to monitor contractors' work and to be involved in audits of water users' financial contributions (Muylwijk, 2013).
- + Promote research analysis from a gender perspective on corruption in the water sector.

³ UN-Water: <http://www.unwater.org/sdgs/a-dedicated-water-goal/en>.

⁴ Gender and Water Alliance: <http://genderandwater.org/en>.

⁵ Women for Water Partnership: www.womenforwater.org/openbaar/index.php?sitedeellID=68.