

A Summary Report

On a

***One day Workshop on the dissemination of the findings of
research on "Gender Issues in Management of Water
Projects in Nepal"***

Jointly organised

by

***Shibesh Regmi, Director of Actionaid Nepal, University of
Southampton, UK, and Samuhik Abhiyan, Nepal***

at

***Hotel Himalaya,
Kathmandu***

on

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Report written by Tina Wallace

1. Introduction

A one-day workshop was held in Nepal on 11th September 2001 to share the findings of research on "Gender Issues in the Management of Water Projects in Nepal"¹. It was well attended and brought together more than fifty participants from government, non governmental and donor organisations involved in water supply and sanitation programmes in different parts of Nepal; participation in the workshop was lively.

2. Purpose of the workshop

The aim was to share the findings from the three-year research project carried out by Shibesh Regmi and to promote discussion and sharing of experiences around the central research issues. It was also hoped that concrete suggestions could be generated for moving the agenda forward around gender in the water sector in Nepal.

3. Sharing of Experiences and Learning

The workshop began with an informal sharing of the participants' experiences and learning around water and gender issues. There was a great deal of water expertise in the room and many interesting issues were raised. Among these were:

- the need to involve men in projects which target women, and the challenges of involving women and men equally in project work
- recognition that women are often targeted in water projects to undertake construction and form user groups, but only occasionally are they given training to enable them to manage water supplies
- recognition that women need support in many different areas to enable them to participate in water provision, including literacy, income generation and awareness and confidence building
- much project work is piecemeal and uncoordinated, run by agencies and within communities where little gender sensitisation has taken place, and where awareness and understanding of gender inequality is low
- acknowledgement that the importance of gender issues in water provision and management has only recently been recognised in Nepal and direct experience of working on gender issues is limited to a handful of agencies

4. Presentation of the research findings

Shibesh Regmi presented his key findings in a lively and detailed talk, followed by a question and answer session, and formal critiques by a number of invited speakers.

4.1 Conceptual framework (gender and development)

The research explored the way gender issues are taken into account and addressed at different levels in the development process, with a *particular focus* on how organisations (government

¹ DFID UK sponsored this workshop under the dissemination grant to the research programme.

and NGOs) address gender issues in their water programmes, through their *policies, procedures and personnel*. Eight indicators were developed to assist with a gender analysis of the implementing agencies. These included their organisational structure and culture; their policy formulating mechanisms; the organisation's objectives and strategies; the personnel policies and human resource development; the provision of gender training; and the role of change agents in the organisation. The focus on assessing how gender sensitive **organisations** are, how they operate and do or do not enable their staff to work in gender aware ways, with appropriate support, was one of the most innovative elements in this research.

The research also focused, to a lesser extent, on the more traditional level of community awareness and participation in relation to gender. Five indicators were developed for assessing gender at the community level, to measure the success of selected drinking water projects in meeting women's gender interests. These were

- Women's participation in project activities
- Changes in the traditional gender division of labor
- Women's access to and control over resources
- Equity in sharing of benefits
- Women's increased status and involvement in new development initiatives

The research focused on how to assess the benefits water projects bring to women, as well as men, and whether these go beyond meeting the very practical needs of women for more and better quality drinking water supplies. The research argued that water projects need to do more than increasing supplies of water and setting up basic structures for managing them. In order to ensure sustainability they need to be able to involve women in a range of ways, including their meaningful (not token) participation in decision making from design through to management and evaluation. These projects need to be used as leverage for addressing gender inequalities at the community level, otherwise women's participation will remain peripheral, and the range of needs they have- e.g. for income generation, for more say in community decision-making- will remain unmet. The research argued that little can be achieved by simply involving women in practical tasks around water, without addressing their marginalisation within households and communities. Unless these issues are addressed the projects will have limited impact and probably not continue beyond the life of the project; women will not have been enabled to participate in development initiatives.

The aim of empowering women through water projects is in line with many policy commitments from the wider international and national communities, yet is usually not addressed. The changing policies and commitments of the international agencies and policy commitments were also presented in the research, which showed there is a wide gap between the policy rhetoric and the realities in water supply projects on the ground in Nepal.

The conceptual framework incorporated analysis of gender issues at all these levels and the ways these levels interact: donors, international policy makers; national organisations and the community. Within the community women and men were approached separately.

4.2 Research methodology

The research was based on participatory methodologies at the project level, questionnaires and interviews within the sample organisations, as well as studying the policies and procedures of international and national organisations, and wider reading. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) techniques and tools were used in combination with various Gender and Development

frameworks such as the Harvard Analytical framework, Moser's roles and responsibilities framework, and Llongwe's empowerment framework. The research drew on key elements within the different gender frameworks to develop the tools for use on the data from Nepal.

4.3 The research sample in Nepal

The research was based on work with three different projects. First, the Nepal Water for Health (NEWAH) drinking water projects based in Motipur and Magaragadhi in mid-west Nepal. Second, the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Programme (RWSSP), a Finnish drinking water project in Gajedi, west Nepal (these two projects were based in the Terai). Third, a government project, the Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation (DWSS) project in Hile in East Nepal (a gravity flow scheme in the hills).

4.4 Key findings

4.4.1 International policy level

- Water is currently seen primarily as an economic good in international policy thinking, so people are expected to pay for water services. It is no longer defined as a social good/right. This international approach lacks any gender analysis so risks failing women who usually have the main responsibility for providing drinking and domestic water within households. Female headed households, and women in poor households, often cannot use improved water services because of the economic imperative of cost-recovery. Many women worldwide do not have access to, or control over, income or financial resources, so charging for new water supplies often forces them to return to their traditional unhygienic sources.
- The private sector as the best service provider is being internationally promoted based on claims that it provides better services. Delivery of water services by the private sector is driven by decisions around where demand is highest and where profits can be made, e.g. in commercial agriculture, irrigation and industry. These users inevitably get disproportionate allocations of water because they can pay and profits can be made, while provision for poor households gets left behind.

4.4.2 National level

- Policy on gender in Nepal is weak. Gender is absent from the national policies on water (the Water Resource Act 1992, Water Resources Regulation 1993 and 1998 and National Water Supply and Sector Policy 1998). The recently published National Water Supply Sector Policy (NWSSP) 1998, reveals that the management of drinking water projects in the country is not addressing gender issues in the water sector.
- The current Ninth Five Year Development Plan (1997-2002) which aimed to provide all Nepalese with basic water supply facilities by the end of 2002 does not provide any breakdown, by gender roles and responsibilities, in its policies or objectives.
- Gender sensitivity is lacking in the policy documents of donors as well. While documents talk about water users/consumers and their associations, water resources committees and conflict resolution committees, none of these documents define who needs to belong to these associations. Therefore, currently they are often formed without the presence of women as members.
- Women are poorly represented in any of the decision-making structures at the national level.

4.4.3 Institutional level

- In all the studied agencies (NEWAH, DWSS and RWSS), women were not contributing to the formulation of institutional policies because their representation at the policy-making level within the organisations is nil or negligible. The dominant culture of the organisations is hierarchical and male, intimidating to women and junior staff.
- Recruitment practices are gender insensitive so agencies have failed to increase the number of women staff in relation to the number of men.
- There is very little flexibility around the terms and conditions of work for women, and these rarely acknowledge their multiple roles and responsibilities, making it hard for many women to stay in post even once they are recruited. Where flexibility does exist it is usually verbal and discretionary, rather than enshrined in policy.
- Gender training was weak. NEWAH performed better than the other two agencies in providing gender training to the staff, and having more staff and management who understand gender issues; since the research NEWAH has pioneered many new policies in relation to gender within the organisation. However, at the time of the research training in all three agencies was haphazard and usually one-off.
- None of the agencies had any plan for systematically addressing gender issues within the organisation, and whatever gender activities were happening were on an *ad hoc* basis.
- Few financial resources were allocated within budgets for work on gender within the organisation or at the project level.

4.4.4 Project level

- No systematic gender analysis at community level was undertaken by any of the projects to understand women's needs in relation to water. However, more gender sensitiveness was found in NEWAH projects, where the feasibility team did include women and more women's issues were captured in the project design than in the other two agencies. Overall, projects tend to rely on standardised designs and assume community needs without analysing them or talking in detail to local women and men.
- All projects failed to inject into the minds of the local men and NGOs the need for involving women from the start of the project . No time was allocated for staff to work to prepare women and men for their new roles and responsibilities around water.
- Women's participation in water projects was largely focused around the provision of their labour for unskilled work, often adding to their already heavy workloads.
- The specialised roles given to women within the water supply projects were largely unpaid and unskilled, e.g. in health and sanitation. Men were given the jobs which required skills and were remunerated such as latrine construction, masonry etc.
- No preparation work was done with women to give them confidence or skills for participating in meetings or water users committees, so even where they were invited to attend often their participation was tokenistic.
- The projects failed to benefit all these living together in a community because of design rigidity (e.g. around cost recovery). Among the beneficiaries the poor, 'voiceless' women had to walk further to collect water than women from well-off households. Some poor women could not afford to pay the water charges and so were forced to continue to use traditional sources, which were less clean and distant. Many women lack the authority to

control financial resources within the household, and because men did not prioritise the need to pay for domestic water seeing this as woman's responsibility, they cannot pay the dues required.

- While the water provided did cut down on the time needed to collect water for some women, this did not result in time-savings for women. Sometimes they were required to bring more water than before, sometimes men stopped assisting them with water collection
- The projects have not been able to increase women's access to and control over income. The expected benefits in terms of new income generating opportunities did not materialise because women lacked the skills needed for this new work, or the markets were absent, or the time required for new activities exceeded the expected returns.
- The projects have failed to enhance self-esteem and status of community women, though these could have led to many other benefits to them, their families and the whole society. The research argued that the inability to empower women to participate fully in the projects and to take on other development work threatens the very sustainability of the water supply and management systems.
- Water projects do attempt to address the practical needs of women for water for domestic use. However, the fact that they fail to address women's subordination and lack of power within households and communities threatens the sustainability of the projects and means that many of the expected benefits in terms of income generation, participation, skills development never materialise.

The research argued forcibly that a woman's practical AND strategic needs have to be met in order for water projects to achieve the range of impacts that is claimed for them. Gender sensitive tools are needed to assess levels of gender awareness and commitment at every level, and strategies need to be developed and implemented that meet gender needs at the organisational as well as the community levels.

5. Comments from water experts and other participants

After the presentation of the research findings several experienced and respected people in the water sector made detailed comments. Their presentations were followed by contributions and discussion groups from many participants within the workshop. These findings are summarised below.

5.1 Some of the key points raised

5.1.1. Inadequate water supplies in Nepal

- Water is a scarce commodity in Nepal when compared with the per capita globally. The main problem in Nepal is the accessibility to safe drinking water. The Ninth Five Year Plan was to provide 100% of running water to all rich and poor but only 75% has been achieved till now.
- There are many incomplete water projects and the budget constraint is always there. Water is seen as a fundamental right of the people, yet some regions of Nepal lack good water resources.

5.1.2. The role of women in water

- In rural water projects, the focus should be on women and the poor. Women are the providers of domestic water supply and they are the main users. They have to be

empowered to ensure water supplies are relevant and sustainable. Institutional changes, as the research stresses, can increase women's participation in water projects and help women address many issues.

- Women's involvement is necessary throughout the whole project process from planning to sustainability to make a difference. Policy and formation of laws focusing on gender alone will not help, finding gender sensitive ways of implementation to make it a difference at the community level is the main challenge.
- Training programmes targeting women are essential so those women can take the lead and manage water programmes after the completion of programmes. Without this work sustainability will be in question.
- Equal access to education is not enough to ensure women's proper participation, a special approach to girl's education, especially in the technical aspects, must be emphasised. Ways must be found to ensure so that employment follows after girls complete their education, especially in 'male dominated' professions and skills.
- Women are already overloaded, and lack opportunities in every sphere because of their task overload. The load sharing of women at home is carried out by girl child, which has a negative impact on the human resource development of our country.
- When projects are planned with a cost benefit analysis, women's time is given the value of zero – so how could these water projects be said to be economically feasible? They rely heavily on women's inputs and time, but there is marginal value allocated for women's time in all projects and "0" in water projects.
- The Rural & Urban Partnership Programme of UNDP had succeeded in promoting women's participation, which was very high. Women took on new responsibilities and made all the decisions necessary; women showed their responsibility in taking care of the projects and this programme provides a positive example of the involvement of women in Nepal in development.
- It is true that only accessibility of water will not promote economic growth, therefore income generating activities are also necessary simultaneously. It is agreeable that water cannot be a commodity but public goods. Therefore, cost subsidiary should not be imposed on the consumer.

5.1.3 Government perspectives

- The findings of this research will be very relevant to plan for the 10th Five Year Plan preparatory planning. Recommendations will be incorporated after reviewing the workshop report. The government is keen to move in the issue of gender and water but lacks budgetary resources and is often bound by donor regulations, which focus on water as an economic good rather than a social good or human right (which the Nepal Government would prefer). Drinking water is a human right and should be taken as a public good. It is the state's responsibility to provide this basic need. Why should government have to follow the suggestions of major donors such as World Bank and Asian Development Bank and focus on the economic value of water?
- It is not Gender weakness but gender blindness that is prevailing at every level from Government to individual level. There is still a lack of gender sensitivity in recognising women as participants, change agents and beneficiaries.
- The general ideology in the water sector (within and beyond government) is that it is a hard-core sector, technical, and physically suitable for men only. The myth that women are technologically blind continues, assuming that women are soft, cannot do hard work and are

not intellectual. The research shows that there is a lot to be done to make the water sector more gender sensitive.

- The welfare approach towards women is dominant in Nepal, with her domestic tasks and responsibilities at the core. While women can protect and maintain programmes well, and they have good, indigenous and traditional knowledge in selecting water resources, selecting suitable technology etc. this knowledge is being overlooked. Their participation is encouraged but it is still tokenistic. However, when supplying public goods women must be encouraged to become agents of change at all levels.
- There were only eight women present at the recent National Planning Commission Meeting for the preparatory work for 10th Five Year Plan of the government, compared to two hundred men. Women's lack of real participation at the community level can be understood when it is nominal, symbolic and token at the national level. Women's participation is encouraged but few measures are taken to promote it at every level.
- There is gender insensitivity in the policy documents of the government, but there have been some positive changes in law that gender is to be looked at in the government sector. However, so far written concepts are not well reflected in practice. Policy and practice seem in isolation with each other, so practicing the concept prior to gender mainstreaming is necessary.
- There is a need for gender sensitive language in document guidelines and a detailed analysis for empowerment. Someone shared examples from education and health. In education 50% of the budget goes to boys and 50% to girls but in reality on 40% is spent on girls and 60% on boys. The number of men and women coming for different health services is not reported or recorded. There is a need for gender-disaggregated data in reporting and recording to find out how many men and women take which service. There is a real need for better assessment in order to mainstream gender in all sectors
- Government Plans for the future: Mainstream gender concern in every sector/level and in national and sectoral policy; promote men's recognition for women's recognition; develop a national and sectoral strategy for women's empowerment towards promoting gender equality; gender sensitisation for policy makers; drinking water must be a public good and not paying goods.

5.1.4 The gender issues are different in different communities

- The research areas of the hills and Terai have different socio - cultural and geographical aspects and these contexts need to be taken when engendering projects and water programmes. The gender issues are not the same, nor are the technical challenges of water provision and management. It is important to understand the contexts socially and the technical requirements of different places- the relations between gender relations and the water supplies may vary depending on the terrain and technology, as well as existing gender relationships.

6. Critical analysis - Dr. Tina Wallace

“Sadly, global debates concerning water scarcity and water management have tended to draw on rather vague political, economic or theoretical assumptions rather than empirically grounded facts and realities. Many of the claims in the global discourses concerning water tend to be, normative, rhetorical and speculative and, at worst, be apolitical and divorced from socio-political realities. Thus there is a need for critical research to map out the mismatch between

rhetoric and reality across the macro, meso and micro realms." Lyla Mehta Water for the 21st century: challenges and misconceptions. IDS. Working paper 111,2000

It is important to start learning from experience rather than basing projects on ideology. What is happening at every level from international level to community level in relation to the provision of sustainable drinking water and making it accessible to all? It is important to shape policy on collected experiences rather than donor fashions.

The research is a serious attempt to address the vacuum around empirical research on drinking water, and has been undertaken in a context of poor and inadequate water provision for millions of people, especially poor women and men, in contradiction to the many global commitment to provide water for all.

Key findings from the research in Nepal, which placed gender at the centre of the analysis:

- The research highlighted a lack of clarity about what gender means at all levels. It is not well understood nor well analysed.
- There is lack of agreed understanding of gender, or how to analyse gender relations which has led to a rather mechanistic and simplistic approach to gender in many cases. Gender is often seen as involving women in implementation and user committees - the deep cultural, educational and other barriers to their real participation are overlooked.
- Standard tools for addressing gender issues are used, without adequate understanding of the context or the issues involved in many cases.
- Measuring success of water projects predominantly focuses on the technical issues and meeting the set targets rather than analyzing accessibility, especially of women and the poor. Questions about how water is controlled and used, who has more benefits from the projects, and the issues of sustainability are not measured in most evaluations and reviews.
- Little attention is given to issues of empowerment of women and enabling them to become active agents of development in most water projects.

There are some explanations given as to why work on gender in water supplies is so limited -despite the fact that the policy commitment to promoting the role and needs of women in the drinking water sector is clear. They include:

1. Serious contradictions at the heart of water policies -cost recovery may not fit easily with access to all, privatisation may not promote social equality and access for the poor, water as an economic good might exclude the participation of poor women,
2. These contradictions at the international level are reflected in Nepali policies. In the context of Nepal very few research studies have been carried out to ensure that gender relations are understood and addressed in this context.
3. Women's voices are rarely heard within the top-down hierarchical male organisations. Implementing organisations reflect the existing gender inequalities within the wider society.
4. Gender relations, like caste and class relations, are often unchallenged and accepted at the local level because of their embeddedness in culture and religion.

5. Little work has been done to explore and question the exclusion of the poor and women in decision-making and access and control.
6. Donors do not ask for a gender perspective monitoring and evaluation, neither do they seriously measure issues such as access for all, degree of women's participation, and sustainability.
7. Engineers and technical issues dominate the supply of drinking water. The multiple use of water within the community and the differential access according to the issues of power is largely ignored. Community is usually seen as homogeneous rather than heterogeneous with different people having different needs and interest depending on class and gender.
8. Gender issues are not explicitly referred to in private sector provision and their focus on efficiency and profit maximisation will probably clash with meeting the needs of the poor and the powerless, including women.
9. There is limited work to enable staff to understand and work on gender and limited training and follow up.
10. Other factors that need addressing to enable women to participate and benefit are overlooked in water projects, including building their confidence, education, provision of health skills for income generation etc.
11. There is a serious lack of representation of women at all levels in Nepal, including in the water sector.

7. Ways forward, drawn from the research, Tina's presentation and the inputs of the participants

7.1 International level:

- Look at contradictions in the policy level.
- Promote research on policies to understand their impact on water programmes at the local/village level.
- Promote more debate around the issues of water as an economic good, cost recovery and privatisation.
- Encourage donors to follow up their verbal commitment to gender issues with concrete activities in monitoring and evaluation.
- Explore how water policies based on water as economic good fit with a 'rights approach' to development and promoting sustainable rural households?

7.2 National level

- Carry out studies on the impact of different water provision on gender relation and access at the local level. What works from the perspective of women, and the poor, has to be assessed in the national context.
- Find ways to measure commitments to gender in the water legislation. Make government more accountable.
- Feed in findings from the research, into the next five year plan

- Promote the idea of a Nepal gender policy. Agree what gender means in Nepali context.
- Raise the level of women's representation throughout Nepal.
- Promote advocacy on the behalf of women, but also activism to make policy makers listen.
- Study and experience your own context and share your experiences at every level.
- Encourage more open ways of working within government institutions to ensure the voices of the poor and women, especially poor women, can be heard and can shape interventions.

7.3 Organisational level

- Gender training and gender analysis to become part of the organisational priorities.
- Promote the recruitment and retention of women staff through new family friendly policies and term of service.
- Undertake social analysis at the start of the projects and monitor against social criteria, including gender relations and continuing poverty, during projects.
- Evaluate over time to assess issues of access and exclusion, sustainability, the meaning of women's participation, the barriers they face and how to address them.
- Enable men at all levels to start to understand and value the role of women in development. Take a team approach and address the needs of men and women within each organisation.
- Find ways to enable organisations to listen to local people's voices, men and women both, and work with local realities
- Use the eight point framework developed by the research for measuring how gender sensitive organisations are and make plans to increase their gender work accordingly.

7.4 Local level

- Gender is a complex process so take time to listen to women, understand their needs, roles and responsibilities and the barriers to meeting their needs. Learn from your own experience and build on your own experience.
- Find ways to address the barriers preventing women having access to decision-making, participation and resources. Take a holistic approach and address issues such as lack of confidence, need for girl's education, skills training for income generating in order to meet women's strategic needs. Make links for women to enable them to access education, training, new skills, income generation, and improved health. These will not happen automatically.
- Disseminate and discuss the idea of women's contribution to development and the importance of promoting their work and status, with women and men, to ensure they can become development agents.
- Raise awareness with men and women, expose them and find ways to promote their active involvement in development debates and practices.

- Move from assumptions to understanding local realities

8. Issues and challenges raised during the course of the workshop

1. Taking a gender approach may still not address the needs for a pro-poor approach. Socially excluded groups are not yet able to have the water services at the community level because of the socio-cultural practice of caste system.
2. There is a big gap between practical gender needs and strategic gender needs. Although there are policy reforms to promote the strategic needs of women, projects have been addressing the practical needs of women. For example water, which is the practical need of women is made more accessible through water projects whereas the strategic need that there has to be 50% women's representation in the water user committee has not been put into practice.
3. Women's participation at the policy level right down to the water users level is very low. Getting meaningful participation of women at every level is hard, especially given their heavy workloads, lack of education and confidence, as well as cultural norms which define them as subservient.
4. There is a lack of coordination between different development activities, which reduces the possibility of working on women's multiple needs and the many barriers inhibiting their active involvement in development.
5. Projects do not allocate enough preparation time for gender responsiveness. There are no budgets for this. Projects are time bound and target oriented reducing the scope for gender sensitive work, which takes time.
6. There is a lack of trained women to work on gender issues alongside the men- this is true at all levels.
7. Nepal is a male dominated society and its institutions are all male dominated.
8. The cost recovery approach raises many problems for reaching the poor, and especially poor women. For sustainability costs need to be recovered, and community contributions promote ownership. A demand driven approach which treats water as an economic good could be fine, providing the poorest men and women who cannot afford to pay are given subsidies. Government policy should ensure certain criteria for the poorest and marginalised men and women, and make implementation of subsidies mandatory with local communities deciding on subsidies and targeting them. However, others felt that cost recovery in terms of money is difficult, and nobody should be deprived of their right to water because of their deprivation/marginalisation. The payment system cannot be rigid if projects are to involve women and the poor. Some felt that this economic approach has been imposed from outside and Nepal should try and find a way to hold to water as a right/public good- but how, given the realities of donor funding?
9. Women are overloaded with, and intertwined in, different issues. They need time to overcome many different barriers in reality. What has to be done to counteract the challenges they face and promote their status and situation?