

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender issues are usually seen as women's issues. However, "gender" means men and women, and crystallises in the social differences between men and women. The focus on women during this research is not intended to diminish in any way the importance of community participation, (i.e. the organised involvement of a wide spectrum of men *and* women in development projects). Neither does the emphasis on women in this research imply a dismissal of the complexity and relevance of social class, together with cultural and other factors in influencing the project's outcome. The overriding goal is to place people, their behaviour and their interaction with and within the environment at the centre of all development projects.

For many years development projects have been technical projects, focusing on construction work for water supply and sanitation facilities. Villagers and communities were seen as just users and beneficiaries. Since the 1970s, possibilities for participating in the planning, management and maintenance of development projects were broadened for these villagers. But although the projects said they worked with "villagers", "leaders" and "committees", they almost always dealt only with the male population. Women were usually targeted only for health education.

In the 1980s, a more gender sensitive approach has shown that women have several roles to play in matters of development, by tradition and by necessity. Women have very specific ideas about what they want and what they need. Additionally, their participation in the projects often enhanced the efficiency and effectiveness of the installation and operation of water supply and sanitation facilities, for example. It is therefore necessary for those with the social responsibility for managing an activity or resource to participate actively in the range of decisions affecting these spheres and any attendant arrangements.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

This document reports on the research done by the CSIR on gender issues in rural water supply and sanitation projects. The main aim of the research was to determine the needs of both women and men regarding the roles and responsibilities of the women in water supply and sanitation projects, in order to formulate guidelines and recommendations regarding strategies for the empowerment of women in water supply and sanitation projects.

The objectives of the project were the following:

- to analyse the role and impact of women's involvement in water supply and sanitation projects in the Northern Province and the Eastern Cape;
- to analyse the impact of women's involvement in water supply and sanitation projects on the empowerment of women;

- to assist in the development of a strategy for the enhancement of the role of women in water supply and sanitation projects; and
- to initiate and design workshops to ensure women's involvement in water supply and sanitation projects .

The research was conducted in rural villages in the Northern Province and the Eastern Cape.

A total of 218 interview schedules were completed, 97 interviews in the Northern Province and 121 interviews in the Eastern Cape.

3. RESULTS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE PROJECT

Three of the four objectives of the project were addressed successfully. The last objective, (i.e. to initiate and design workshops to ensure the involvement of women in water supply and sanitation projects), was not addressed. The WRC Steering Committee for the project recommended that this objective be addressed by a follow-up project during the next year (WRC Steering Committee Meeting Minutes of 23 May 1997).

As a first step of the project, an interview schedule was developed and piloted in the Northern Province. This interview schedule served as a guide for the discussions with the focus groups. This interview schedule was revised in the light of the recommendations of the target groups, as well as the interviewers. The necessary indicators to make the research both valid and valuable were also incorporated.

An interview schedule was also developed for individuals and households.

Both interview schedules were made available in English, but the interviews in the villages were conducted in the home languages of the target groups.

The pocket chart method was used to gather information on the roles of men and women in decision-making processes in the villages.

The project team consisted of personnel from the CSIR in Pretoria as well as personnel from the Rural Support Services in the Eastern Cape. The members of the project team acted as the interviewers in the villages.

The interviewers had been trained in basic interviewing skills, the implementation of the questionnaire and the pocket chart method of gathering information. Notes were also made available to assist the interviewers in implementing the questionnaire and pocket chart method.

In order to obtain the co-operation and support of the members of the community in which the research was to be conducted, the project was introduced to the relevant authorities to obtain their permission to work in their areas or jurisdictions.

4. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The project team made the following conclusions from the research and the data gathered:

4.1 DECISION-MAKING

In all the villages where the research was done, the men played the prominent role and were seen by both men and women as the leaders and decision-makers. In all committees but one (the Bread Baking Committee in the Eastern Cape), men occupied the key decision-making positions. Sometimes this was the result of the men taking the lead and excluding the women, because of perceptions that women did not have the ability to manage projects and make decisions. However, in most instances the men's occupation of the key decision-making positions was the result of the unwillingness of the women themselves to participate because of their own perceptions of not having the ability or the education and training to make the decisions.

The women were not entirely excluded from making decisions during project planning and implementation. The men consulted the women whenever a decision had to be made, but the involvement of the women was very informal and unobtrusive. However, even though the women's involvement was almost invisible, they exercised their powers in more subtle ways (at home) in order to sway the decision-making to fit their needs and goals.

4.2 CULTURE

The cultural norms and values of the villages played a major role in the participation and decision-making processes in the villages. Men were regarded by all in the community as superior to women; that was the custom, and it will take years of successful leadership by women to change it. This belief led to the men feeling uncomfortable when women were allowed to participate in meetings and in the decision-making processes on a formal basis, because men were the decision-makers, not women. In communities where traditional norms and values were not very strong, the people were more flexible regarding the participation of women in projects.

4.3 ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The women also showed a tendency to push the men to the fore when interaction had to take place with people from outside the community. They preferred the men to deal with the outsiders as the men were seen by everyone in the community - including the women, - to be more educated and capable of handling the situation. The focus of the young girls and the women was on the family and the household, while the men and boys focused on education and training outside the home. The workload of women and girls was also such that they did not have time to attend schools or training courses, while the men and boys had ample time for education and training.

4.4 TRAINING AND EDUCATION

Literacy and education were valued highly by the community members, both male and female. However, more men were literate than women. This had the consequence that the women did not participate in projects because most of them could not read and write.

Women who were educated were more confident about participating in the project and decision-making processes. However, these women were not completely successful in overcoming the enculturated norms, values and traditions of gender roles and positions in the community. Women who did take the initiative to participate in the decision-making processes were often treated disrespectfully by the men, which led to the women eventually withdrawing. Many women mentioned that the fact that their husbands were migrant workers and not at home most of the time forced them to take responsibility for their lives in the community, and to participate in projects in general. This created an opportunity for the women to prove that they were capable of making valid decisions and managing projects on their own, therefore forcing recognition from the men in the community.

4.5 ATTITUDES AND AWARENESS

Many of the above situations resulted from a lack of awareness between men and women of their respective roles and responsibilities. Therefore misunderstanding of the roles and responsibilities of both sexes, by both sexes, played a big role in implementing the decision-making processes in water supply and sanitation projects.

4.6 THE IMPACT OF WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION ON WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION PROJECTS

In all the villages where the research was done, the men managed and took the lead in the water supply and sanitation projects. The women who were on the committees normally served as secretaries or ad hoc members, with very limited or no decision-making powers.

In these projects there was no marked difference as far as the effective delivery of the water or sanitation service was concerned. However, there were problems regarding the involvement and the commitment of the community as a whole, with a very low willingness to take ownership and responsibility for the service.

In the villages where women performed key roles such as chairperson or treasurer on a committee, they were normally active and respected in the community before the start of the project. This led to the acceptance of the project by the community, which is a necessity for the sustainability of a project.

4.7 BARRIERS TO THE EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN

Water supply and sanitation projects did not necessarily empower the women in the communities, but they did create an opportunity for women to become empowered should they wanted to. The biggest obstacles to women becoming

empowered were their own attitude and lack of confidence in their abilities. This was exacerbated by the attitudes of the men, which were closely linked to the traditional culture and belief that men are superior to women and therefore the decision-makers.

Traditional culture (norms and values) was voiced by the women in the villages as a major barrier to becoming empowered. The process of cultural change was already well advanced and traditions were changing as demonstrated by the expressed willingness of the men to allow women to make decisions and to participate in the management of services and projects.

Another major barrier was the fact that most women in the villages were illiterate and had not received any formal education or training. However, the training did not impact on the empowerment of the women as it was technical training and did not afford the women the opportunity to influence decision-making or take part in the decision-making process.

The time constraints women have as a result of their household duties can also be a barrier to their empowerment. Linked to this is the lack of access to resources such as money, transport, etc, for the women in the villages to attend meetings, training courses or planning sessions.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Holistic development has become a vital aspect of sustainable development. It is a recognised fact world wide that projects that take human factors into consideration are more likely to be successful than those that do not. It should also be noted that the mere participation of villages in a project is not a solution, but a necessary forerunner, for success and empowerment.

The project team recommends the following as a strategy for the empowerment of rural women in the field of water supply and sanitation:

5.1 Policy and process

The Department of Water Affairs and Forestry already has a policy on gender issues in place. It is necessary that other government departments also invest in developing gender policies and regulations in their areas of expertise. The institutional arrangements and business plans needed to implement these policies will be critical in achieving the objectives of the policies.

5.2 Implementation plan

Changing attitudes and perceptions regarding gender in water supply and sanitation in the rural areas will require a number of interventions, as discussed in this document.

5.3 The training of local government structures, NGOs and consultants

People of the opposite sex who seldom come into contact with one another on certain issues have an opportunity to discover and explore different perceptions. Thus, bottom line benefits are identified which transcend and overcome cultural role differentiation.

A "culture" of gender awareness should be facilitated in the communities, where roles and responsibilities are shared across gender role boundaries, as well as cultural belief boundaries.

5.4 Forums for communication regarding gender issues

Platforms for discussing and debating issues regarding gender in water supply and sanitation projects need to be established. Discussions should be held to explore feelings and obtain information about areas that need attention. Making people aware of past, present and future realities is essential to the development of viable values that will guide behaviour and allow the understanding of important issues. These forums or platforms should be established at national, regional, local and grass roots level to facilitate communication and discussion.

5.5 Developing gender awareness programmes

The gender awareness programme should address issues around the empowerment of women within their cultural settings and constraints. At grass-roots level in the communities a gender awareness workshop will be more effective than training courses or written material, because the majority of the members of the communities in the rural areas are illiterate.

5.6 Implementing gender awareness workshops

Gender awareness workshops need to be implemented in every rural community across the country, and should be participatory, and sensitive to the cultural traditions and beliefs of the target group or community. The implementation of the workshops will facilitate the process of making the rural communities an active part of the process of empowering their women.

5.7 Monitoring and evaluating the impact of gender awareness workshops

The impact of the gender awareness programmes on the roles and responsibilities of rural women needs to be monitored and evaluated in order to meet their needs, as well as the needs of the men. The evaluation of the gender awareness programmes will provide guidelines for their continued development and growth.

5.8 Alignment of the gender awareness programmes

This gender awareness will encourage women to attend empowerment workshops or courses in order to become more empowered in their own communities. The gender awareness programme for the rural areas should grow and develop into an empowerment programme for both women and men in the rural areas. Again, it is important to remember to include the men in these women's families, society or community.

5.9 The Empowerment Programme

While the gender awareness programme is being implemented, an empowerment programme for women should be developed so that, when the gender awareness programme has run its course, the empowerment programme is already in place to facilitate the growth and establishment of empowered rural women. The empowerment programme should follow the same process of the gender awareness programme and should consist of written material such as booklets, pamphlets and posters, as well as training courses and workshops. Again, the workshops will have the biggest impact as they will address both literate and illiterate people.

5.10 The Empowerment Workshops

The empowerment workshops should enable the women participants to become confident, self-motivated and self-reliant in managing projects and impacting on the quality of life in the community without being ostracised or looked down upon by the other community members. The empowerment workshops should make it clear to both men and women that empowerment is about effective gender balance in decision-making both at a personal and a community level.

The benefits of the empowerment of women should be discussed with the men and the women in the community, and linked to the effect empowered women will have within their community in terms of job creation, quality of life and the sustainability of projects.

6. FURTHER RESEARCH

The project team identified the following areas for further research in the nature of the relationships between men and women:

- the impact of sexual division of labour on the empowerment of women;
- the alleviation of women's burden of domestic labour and child care;
- women's access to credit, productive assets and other resources;
- the improvement of educational opportunities for women;

- strategies for equal opportunities for employment and equal pay for men and women;
- the impact of empowerment workshops on the self-awareness and gender awareness of women and men;
- the impact of empowerment workshops on the socio-cultural values of women and men;
- the impact of the empowerment of women on water supply services in the urban areas;
- the role of women in cost recovery for water supply and services in urban areas; and
- the role of women in cost recovery for water supply in the rural areas.