READER
A compilation of best practices, lessons learned and technical designs from leading water professionals and water-related organizations.

WOMEN AND WATER
HEALTH, WATER AND EDUCATION
MONITORING AND EVALUATION
APPROPRIATE TECHNOLOGY
GENERAL WATER AND SANITATION
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Water — women’s work by Barbara Rogers

Barbara Rogers is the author of ‘The Domestication of women: discrimination in developing societies’

‘Are you digging wells here? Back home your agency is advertising that it’s digging wells in the desert.’

‘Well no, we’ve been very disappointed with this well-digging business, as a matter of fact we’ve given up. Everybody thinks wells are so important for village water supplies, but we’ve done everything we can think of and we still can’t get the villagers to take any responsibility for them. I’ve been to villages, collected all the men together, talked with them for hours. Then we come along with the equipment, dig downwards until about midday, and there’s some water at the bottom. I can’t persuade them that we’ve got to go a lot deeper still, otherwise the well will dry up as soon as the dry season starts and they really need the water. Those people just refuse to go on digging, and of course their wells dry up and then they come and ask for more help. I’m fed up with wells.’

‘But why were you only talking to the men? It’s not the men who go out to the well every day, have to carry all that heavy water year in and year out, who actually see the water levels going up and down according to the time of year . . .’

Pause.

‘I wasn’t actually thinking of that at the time. That was before I became enlightened about getting women involved in things.’

Ignoring women

Water experts need no reminder that they are dealing with a basic necessity of life, in fact the most important of them all. But they manage to ignore the fact that women are responsible for fetching water, for rationing it out, and for basic decisions about where it should be obtained.

Contaminated water supplies for drinking, which are such an immense health problem, may be the only choice open to women whose own health and strength is severely overtaxed; a great deal of energy and time must be spent on fetching water and they may well not have either to spare for seeking out cleaner sources. Large amounts of water have to be brought in for drinking, especially in hot climates, with extra amounts for cooking and, with luck, a little left over for washing.

Questions of village water supplies may be a little more complicated than they seem at first sight — because women have reasons of their own for a particular preference. For example, in some places they may prefer to walk some distance for their water, since this provides the only time when they can get together and talk. So a well which is away from the centre of the village will give them time away from the scrutiny of others.

Basic need

A little time for relaxation and meeting others is perhaps just as much of a basic human need as the more obvious physical necessities of life, and for women the well or river...
provides both. The only way to find out the best way of meeting these two needs is to ask the women involved.

If it is not too radical an idea, the planners might even bring themselves to meet the women separately, away from the men, who sometimes silence them in meetings and impose their own interests and demands.

It seems to be very hard for men working in development to deal with village women on equal terms with men — a problem for westerners in particular. Nor is this inhibition peculiar to experts in high technology. Many field workers for voluntary organisations see themselves as one-man problem solvers, with the depressed areas of the Third World as the last frontier for their pioneering spirits. There is a certain *machismo* involved in work on appropriate technologies, which can be blind to the importance of women and the need to involve them in decision-making. Attitudes to Third World men have changed a lot — they are no longer dumb, “backward” peasants but, at least in theory, are suppliers of ingenious technologies of their own, and partners in the development process. This more realistic attitude needs to be extended to Third World women as well.

**Ingenuity**

Poor women, in both rural and urban areas, have to use great ingenuity in their everyday lives, in the struggle to feed increasing numbers of dependents. Conditions have changed very fast for them. The rapid growth of the cash economy largely excludes them yet imposes demands for cash for vital services, and the younger men feel free to travel in search of paid jobs and leave the women of the subsistence household with a double shift — their own and the men’s work.

**Double standards**

Many western men, with their double standards of work, — i.e. ‘real’ work being paid and ‘not work’ being unpaid — fail to recognise the crippling work burden borne by Third World women. Yet if there is one bold generalisation that it is safe to make, it is that women will respond positively to any innovation which reduces their work-load and/or increases their cash income. It has been observed that women are in fact more sensitive to these kinds of direct incentives to innovation than men are. Water projects which provide more accessible, and more abundant supplies of water, in places that women find convenient and socially desirable, offer perhaps the most direct help in this regard. Not only is the extremely heavy work of water-carrying reduced, but during a dry season extra supplies of water can produce a good crop of marketable vegetables.

There is also, of course, the health benefit where contaminated water is replaced by clean water. This is another area where women are particularly sensitive. Health problems arising from water contamination particularly affect the children of which women have charge and they contribute substantially to infant and child mortality. A project in Upper Volta, part of a programme to help women and girls, managed to make the women aware of the connection between dirty water and disease, and they became highly motivated to use simple water filters, using their own pottery jars with sand and charcoal. They would even carry the heavy jars to the fields, during the rainy season, to filter supplies to drink while they worked. Unfortunately, hopelessly inadequate water supplies in the dry season — which meant they had to walk several miles daily — made it physically impossible to bring in enough water, and the children could not be stopped from drinking the extremely dirty water before it had gone through the long filtering process. Better dry-season supplies of water have become an urgent demand of the women involved in this particular project.

It is ironical that the well-digging programme which could have helped them had already been stopped because consultation with the villagers, through the men only, had proved hopelessly impractical.

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**Guinea worm — the unnecessary evil**

GUINEA worm disease is a water-borne infection that affects up to 48 million people annually throughout the Third World. Its complications can be crippling and in a village that has guinea worm, agricultural production may drop by 30 per cent across the board.

Yet guinea worm disease can be prevented with surprisingly little money and some basic knowledge of hygiene. The United Nations has put the eradication of the disease high on its list of aims for the Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade.

Although it is diarrhoeal disease which requires the most urgent attention, according to Dr Berndt Dietrich of the World Health Organisation, "if
Women and water  
by Borjana Bulajich  

Until the way in which water supply and sanitation policies are decided changes to include women in every step of the process, the huge improvements that are necessary for healthy communities will not take place.

Water is a prerequisite for the survival of human beings and for their development. Current and projected problems with freshwater resources arise from the pressure to meet the agricultural, human settlement, food, and industrial needs of a fast-growing global population. Inadequate water and sanitation facilities are some of the most critical problems faced by the developing world today.

Statistics tell the story. In the 1990s, over one billion people in the developing world lack safe and adequate drinking-water, while those lacking sanitation number almost two billion. The lack of a healthy environment and the lack of safe drinking-water are the cause of 900 million cases of diarrhoeal disease every year, which cause the deaths of more than three million children; two million of these deaths could be prevented if adequate sanitation and clean water were available. At any time 200 million people have schistosomiasis or bilharzia, and 900 million more have hookworm, cholera, typhoid, or paratyphoid.

The ever-increasing scarcity of water, combined with environmental degradation, continues to have serious impacts on primary water carriers, managers, end-users, and family health educators. The economic and social costs resulting from the lack of safe drinking-water are high. The average proportion of their working time spent on water collection by women in East Africa varies from about 12 per cent in humid areas to 27 per cent or more in dry or mountainous areas. By virtue of their domestic functions, women are in constant contact with polluted water and are therefore the group most vulnerable to water-related diseases.

Power and responsibility

In the area of water resource development and environmental protection, women are at present more often victims than beneficiaries. As women are responsible for the domestic use of water as well as for the provision of fuel and for the production of food crops, they are the ones keenly aware of and the most adversely affected by the current negative developments. At present, women are still often excluded from both environmental and river basin development projects. For example, planners of projects related to soil conservation, agricultural extension, and credit for water conservation activities seldom include women or women's groups in the planning stage. In most irrigation projects, land and water rights are vested in the male head of the household, leaving women without the land or water to grow the staple foods essential for family health.

Women are more than target groups; they are active agents who can contribute constructively and knowledgeably to policy decisions, and who can also mobilize labour, provide resources, and disseminate and implement innovations. By involving women, particularly in the planning, design, operation, and maintenance stages as well as in health education programmes, water and sanitation projects could more effectively achieve the ultimate goals of more and safer water, resulting in better health.
Women's participation in the development of water facilities should result in a decrease in the drudgery and hard work of water collection.

The multi-sectoral nature of water supply and sanitation activities among women requires appropriate co-ordination among the national institutions and authorities concerned with water, health, sanitation, and agriculture and rural development, as well as among agencies in charge of education and training, including international organizations. Appropriate agencies at the national level should be instrumental in the co-ordination between responsible ministries and women's organizations. The strategy for women's participation needs to include water and sanitation if it is to become an integral part of the whole development process. Improved water supply and sanitation facilities could have many direct benefits, such as the reduction of the drudgery of water collection, an improvement in health, nutrition, and food supply, and environmental protection. Moreover, there are indirect benefits in the form of improved potential for economic and social development, such as the rise in productivity and incomes, and improved standards of living.

The management of local water sources and watersheds, forestation, and the prevention of local pollution are typical areas where the interests of women and development planners go hand in hand, and in which women have already played constructive roles at the neighbourhood and community levels. So far, many countries have adopted policies of community involvement and women's participation, and many ad hoc examples can be found of how this involvement makes a difference to local support, use, and maintenance. Development planners and engineers put policies into practice, and the responsibility ultimately lies with them as to whether these policies surface visibly in projects and programmes. Women's and non-governmental organizations can support this endeavour by establishing cooperative structures in engineering programmes and by educating their own colleagues about how women can play a more prominent role.

Despite their increasingly important and multiple roles, there is still not enough attention paid to women's roles in water supply and sanitation. They are the primary resource in water collection, and they are the greatest users of water. Their water-related work is taken for granted and denied its economic and social value. Women are often excluded from both the early planning and the final implementation of water projects. Projects concerning women lack the elements of communication and information on the relation between water, sanitation, and health. Local women's customs, preferences, and traditions are not taken into consideration during the selection of the technical design and the location of the projects. Training programmes

Coming in the next issue of Waterlines . . .

Our next issue has been coordinated by WaterAid, and will feature articles about Replicability. A project that helps one village resolve their water and sanitation problems is important, but what makes a project so successful that it can be both carried on sustainably once the outside resources are gone, and replicated in other villages? Read the January issue to find out.
on water activities rarely include women, and evaluations seldom consider the impact of water projects on the lives of women specifically.

Positive action
The role of women working in the field could be greatly increased through education, training, and the inclusion of gender issues in water policies, programmes, and projects. Equally, the recognition and enhancement of women in water supply and sanitation depends on a firm commitment at the national level. For example, in low-income urban areas women play a prominent role in innovative approaches to more sustainable water and sanitation services. They are (co-)managers of communal waterpoints, latrines, and vending stations, they run local water supply and wastewater treatment systems, promote domestic sanitation systems, and manage and collect domestic waste for recycling and re-use. In rural areas women, as managers of communal waterpoints, are concerned with drainage and hygiene, the proper use of taps and pumps, and the prevention of damage by children and livestock.

There are many examples of successful solutions to water problems that have also had a positive impact on the environment and the socio-economic well-being of women and their communities. Still, a lot remains to be done to involve them effectively in environmentally sustainable water programmes and projects.

At the national and international levels, government and non-government organisations, women’s groups, and international agencies have critical roles to play. Three points should be made concerning their approaches to women’s participation. Women’s participation should be part of an integrated approach in the management and support of sustainable water activities; women’s issues are an integral part of community and national development concerns, and the emphasis on women’s participation does not imply that activities should be carried out by women only. It stresses rather the need for both men and women to address the issue.

The 1990s and beyond call for a holistic approach towards the development and management of water resources, which is a prerequisite for the effective sustainable development of nations. It implies the development of human societies and economies and the protection of natural ecosystems on which the survival of humanity ultimately depends. This includes the need to look not only at the water cycle, but also at inter-sectoral needs, ecological issues, the alleviation of poverty and disease, sustainable rural and urban development, and protection against natural disasters.

Changes in the way that water supply systems are planned and developed will make a big difference to this Peruvian girl’s life.

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Ways of involving women in water projects
by Carolyn Hannan-Andersson*

This article is drawn from a much wider-ranging study of Singida Region in Tanzania by Carolyn Hanna-Andersson and Ingvar Andersson, who are based at the University of Dar-es-Salaam.

IT is now becoming increasingly clear that water for domestic use is 'women's business'. Women, of course, have always known this. The men in the village will confirm it, laughing at the mere suggestion that men should be involved with such work. The surprising fact is that it took so long for those at the planning level to recognize the importance of women as a target group in improving rural water supplies. In the mid-seventies women were 'rediscovered' and 'reintroduced' into the water supply sector. A lot has been said and written about the need for involving women but as yet little has been put into practice. The challenge is now to work out practical methods for ensuring women's participation.

The key to success in involving women is an acknowledgement of the importance of their contribution to development and the provision of adequate information and motivation for them. Because of their subordinate position in rural societies, special efforts will have to be made to ensure their participation. After studying three villages in Tanzania where water and sanitation programmes had brought no improvements in health, we were able to make some practical suggestions for involving women.

Traditional work

Water collection in rural areas is traditionally women's work, even if they are assisted to a great extent by children, especially girls. In spite of this, women have been consistently excluded from all dialogue about the priority of improved supply, the possible improvements, the implementation and arrangements for operation and maintenance. Unfailingly they have been involved in any 'self-help' construction activities, but they have not always been reached with the necessary promotion or instructions on the proper use of the improved supply, nor with adequate water-related health education.

The almost total exclusion of women from the whole process of improving water supplies may well be the most significant factor in the disastrous failure rate for improved supplies. If women are not included in the planning and implementation of the improved water source, as they have been in the past for traditional water sources, their motivation to use and maintain the new source will be small. In short, they are over-worked, but under-utilized.

The need to learn more about the situation of rural women and their priorities is increasingly evident. This is an essential prerequisite if women are to be involved, if the planned change is to improve their living conditions and social status.

Weak position

Nyaturu women have a relatively weak position in Nyaturu society. They are subordinate to their husbands and have limited access to resources such as information, credit, or technological innovations. They play a very passive role in community affairs and traditional social norms require that they are outwardly deferential to men and do not express themselves at

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public meetings in the presence of men. These are obvious hindrances to involving them in social change.

Attempts have been made to improve water supplies, health standards and sanitation among the Nyaturu since the early 1900s. Little effect has been achieved. While the Nyaturu cannot be said to be opposed to change as such, they are unwilling to accept innovations which upset the traditional system too much, or which cost too much in terms of money, time and effort. If changes are to be made, the advantages must be clear and the means of attaining the changes comprehensible. Communication at the level of individual households is crucial. So is an adequate knowledge of the traditional conditions under which the communities live.

Three villages
In all three villages we studied Unyinya, Unyangwe and Nkhoiree, the majority of households rely on traditional sources, hand-dug unlined wells, for their supply of water for domestic uses. This is in spite of the fact that two of the villages have already received improved supplies, according to the programme for improving water supplies in Singida. The water from the traditional wells is of questionable quality. While the supply is plentiful in the wet season, they sometimes dry out completely in the dry period, or the water seeps in very slowly, resulting in long queues at the wells. Separate wells are dug for cattle. Most domestic wells visited had no hedge or barrier to keep animals out, so that contamination from cattle, dogs and hyenas was possible.

One of the villages, Unyangwe, had an improved supply which was actually functioning at the time of the fieldwork. This village had received two foot pumps. One of these has been out of order since shortly after installation. The second pump has continued to function without problems.

Unyinya village has a windmill which has a long history of breakdowns and slow maintenance. The second supply system planned for this village has never been finished and is unlikely to be completely due to inadequate supply of water. Nkhoiree village has not yet received any improved supply but a survey has been carried out.

The improvements which had been made in the two villages, Unyianga and Unyangwe, were totally inadequate. Two foot pumps in a village for a population of 1,671 and one windmill supplying one domestic point and cattle trough for a village

Map to show the position of Singida
with a population of 2,158, cannot possibly meet the needs. Even when the improved supplies are working, only a small percentage of the population benefits. Given the problems experienced with break-downs, this percentage is lowered even further.

No impact
It could be said that the impact of the improvements made was non-existent. Households using the improved supply and those using the traditional sources had similar water use patterns and standards of health, hygiene and sanitation. The involvement of the communities had been minimal and almost no information at all had been given to them on planned improvements, use of improved supplies or health aspects. There was no integration at all with health education or sanitation inputs.

The percentage of households actually using the improved supplies (when they were working) expressed satisfaction with the quality of the water. They claimed that stomach problems had decreased while the supplies were working. The main complaints about the improved systems were that they were inadequate for the needs of the community. There were also many complaints about the slow maintenance when the pumps or windmills broke down. The suggested improvements were to build more wells with handpumps so that they are closer to all households. Only a small percentage of households in Nkhoiree (which had not yet received any improved supplies) expected the government to deliver a piped supply.

Only very small amounts of water were carried home for domestic use in all three villages. The average consumption was as low as 8.7 litres per person per day (with a range of 2.6-20 litres). However, most washing of clothes was done at the wells and the amount of water used for this activity is thus not included in the calculations. Some bathing was also done at the sources. However, even allowing for those additional litres, the per capita consumption is still far from the recommended 20 litres.

Sanitation
In addition to very low consumption, which did not appear to change noticeably when households were using improved supplies, the handling of water in homes left a great deal to be desired. Standards of personal hygiene were very poor. Sanitation aspects are still unclear, as it is difficult to accurately estimate the actual usage of latrines in a short survey such as this one. However, it was presumed that household members use the bush as much as they use the latrines, especially since many latrines were neither private nor safe enough for regular use. The standard of construction of the latrines was very poor, in
keeping with the general standard of housing. Health education on the relationship between health and water, personal hygiene and sanitation are urgently required, in conjunction with the improvement of the water supplies.

The health situation revealed through interviews with the 75 households is not good. There were lots of stomach problems experienced in the area, as well as bilharzia, malaria and some skin and eye diseases. Diarrhoea is also a problem though not all households considered it an important one.

**Burdens**

By asking women what they considered to be their greatest burdens, it was possible to obtain an impression of their perception of the problem of water supplies. Not one of the women mentioned water collection as the greatest burden they carried. The main burdens were rather agriculture, firewood collection and grinding flour. Of interest and relevance is the fact that when asked about the activities which they enjoyed, 20 per cent of the women mentioned water collection. Since firewood collection and gathering wild vegetables were also mentioned as enjoyable activities, we presume that they offered an opportunity to get away from the house and meet other women.

In spite of the fact that the problem of water supply was not the first priority for the women, only 17 per cent did not consider there was any need for improvement, or could not suggest any improvement. The response of most women indicated that they saw the need for improving water supplies, in order to reduce health problems. However, there was still the attitude that the government should deliver the services promised. Shallow wells with hand or foot pump were quite acceptable to the majority of the women.

**Practical suggestions**

If effective involvement of women in improving water supplies is to be achieved, changes will be necessary at the practical level of organizing and managing projects. On the assumption that water projects will be integrated ones, directed at men and women, special efforts need to be made to include women more fully.

This can be done by employing female project staff, involving village women in village planning meetings, all-women meetings, village water committees, women's promotion groups, dance and drama groups and pump and well caretaker programmes. To mobilize village women, every existing group can be utilized. These include traditional women's groups, Umoja wa Wanawake wa Tanzania (UWT, a political organization), adult education and Maendeleo (development) groups, religious bodies, primary schools and health-care facilities.

The hope is that women staff members will identify more easily with village women than their male counterparts, but there is the possibility that better educated 'town' women may hold some of the negative attitudes that have prevailed towards peasants in general and women in particular. Training in community development methods will be needed for both male and female staff members. Men should be able to accept women staff because water is traditionally a woman's sphere.

Even women of a higher educational standard may have difficulty in asserting themselves in a mixed group, so it might be necessary to appoint more than one so that they can support each other. The most suitable type of woman for the work is a matter for discussion. For instance, unmarried girls may be better qualified educationally than older women. However, they would be less likely to be respected.

**Factors**

When trying to involve village women in village planning meetings, it must be remembered that women will often not speak in large groups containing men, such as village planning meetings. So one strategy is to ensure that they at least attend the meetings, which must therefore be at a time they can manage, and then allow them to express themselves in all-women meetings. The convening of meetings for women alone should not cause objections from the men, since water is women's work. It would be a boost for the women's self-esteem to know that the project team values their opinions and suggestions.

Older married women are likely to remain in the area, but have family responsibilities. Young married women with small children are more likely to be under the control of their families, but older women often have only a poor knowledge of Swahili, the official language. The project must be careful to avoid recruiting women only from the higher levels of the village hierarchy; there is inequality and conflict even among women.

UWT groups, where they exist, may be quite elitist, so efforts would still need to be made to reach the poorer sections of the female community.

In the case of village water committees, it seems that women's role will continue to be low-key for the foreseeable future, though it is important that they are represented, as it does signal an increase in status for women.

**Visual aids**

Material on water, sanitation and health can be included in literacy programmes, perhaps as simple readers, and the effort should be made to use as many visual aids as possible, and to develop discussion techniques. Teachers of adult education groups, who sometimes know little more than the groups they teach, will need to have their information supplemented and supported.

Talents in the field of drama and
dance often have no relation to status or educational standard, and are therefore an area where women from all social categories in the village could participate, as can children.

Women's promotion groups' of 5 to 10 women (one from each 'area' within the village) can be democratically chosen by the women at the start of the project, to observe at all meetings and report back to their areas.

Women pump attendants
Appointing women pump attendants sometimes becomes a goal in itself, and then it is assumed that the business of women's involvement has been attended to. This sort of token attention is not enough. There are practical problems to appointing a woman, especially since training usually occurs at a regional centre and is often for several weeks. Family responsibilities will make it more difficult for women to attend, and they would find it impossible during the peak agricultural period, as they are responsible for producing food crops.

However, it is very important that women should have proper training, as it should improve their chances of being accepted in their villages. If women fail as the result of lack of training, it will be taken as a general indication of their unsuitability for the job. A practical compromise might be to have most of the training in the village, with a short period at the regional headquarters. The duties of a pump attendant include preventive maintenance, minor repairs and reporting breakdowns to headquarters. There must be adequate resources available: equipment, spare parts and back-up support.

Duties
Women well caretakers might be elected, or a large number of women involved by rotating the post monthly. Responsibilities could include ensuring that all women receive information on the use of the well, that a fence or hedge is constructed around it and properly maintained. Well caretakers would also have to prevent children misusing the well and playing inside the enclosure, keep the well site clean and properly drained, and report problems to the pump attendant.

It would make the well caretaker’s job much easier if provision for washing clothes, in the form of a cemented area, was provided close to the well without the risk of polluting the water supply. The well has always been the traditional site for washing clothes, and prohibiting the practice would be unacceptable, as women would be unwilling to carry home all the water needed to do washing at home.

Religious groups
Aspects of personal hygiene and sanitation should be appealing to the followers of Islam, and Christian groups could also be motivated for changes in patterns of living which lead to improved health and well-being.

Special programmes for primary school could be used to encourage children to accept changes, especially in terms of water-use patterns, and influence their mothers. Methodology is essential here, however, as ‘forced labour' with little or no explanation has been used to construct school fields and assist with reforestation programmes in the past. Project staff and other qualified people should supplement the efforts of local teachers. Programmes in schools must above all be realistic. Marguerite Lallicoe, who conducted an earlier study, noted the discouragement that schoolgirls in Singida experienced in the 1960s when they had learnt standards of cleanliness, home care and dress that were often impossible to realize in their mothers' homes or in the houses of the men that were willing to marry them.

For changes to be accepted and internalized, it is necessary to build on existing practices instead of trying to do away with the old order and introduce a completely new pattern of living. In order to achieve this, a sound knowledge of traditional patterns of living is necessary. This includes an understanding of the motivations behind the existing patterns. In efforts to improve women's position in rural areas, the starting point must naturally be an understanding of women's present situation. Understanding of the reasons behind the position and status of women in the society is also essential.

Reference

A cemented area near the village well would prevent this woman from having to carry home water for washing

Photo: UNICEF/Wolff