Women, poverty and water

Rural women are responsible for half of the world’s food production and produce between 60 and 80 percent of the food in most developing countries (FAO 2004). It is likely that their contribution to food security is growing and the responses it generated resulted in a hydraulic civilization that has no parallels in world history. Population growth and competition from different sectors have made rural women a more scarce resource than they were in the past. Women’s contributions to food security are not only critical for food production but also to maximize the value of wealth creation for society. These are:

- Increasing “blue water” productivity to get the most out of renewable water resources. (Blue water is rainfall that runs off rivers and recharges aquifers. It accounts for 40% of all rainfall).
- Integrating “green” water productivity by making the most of soil moisture through natural harvesting and supplemental and micro-irrigation. (Green water is rainfall that does not reach rivers or aquifers but replenishes soil moisture and evaporates from the soil or is transpired by plants. It accounts for 60% of all rainfall and is often overlooked by water managers).  
- Increasing access to water resources through investment in water management development, crucial to the Millennium Development Goals
- Balancing water for food and other ecosystem services through sustainable use of agricultural and water-saving for the needs of the environment.
- Investing in water security to add poverty alleviation by targeting poor areas with pro-poor and gender-equitable interventions.

For more information visit - www.broxy.co

About IWMI

IWMI is an international non-profit research organization, based in Sri Lanka, with offices in Africa and Asia. Our mission is to improve the management of water and land resources in developing countries, for food security, livelihoods and nature. We are one of 15 research centers selected by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR), based in Washington D.C. Our work is supported by the Water for Food Foundation established by the Ford Foundation.

In Sri Lanka, IWMI works extensively in the Ruhuna Basin which is one of IWMI’s four benchmark basins. Other benchmark basins are the Olifants Basin in Africa, the Rechna Doab in Pakistan and the Phare Basin in India. Research in Sri Lanka is selected by the Canadians on the basis of modern mathematics and technology. The Government requested the Canadians to shift the dam area of the new dam a few feet upstream so that the ancient dam could be preserved’. Water for domestic and agricultural purposes was not the only concern of ancient hydraulic engineers. Aesthetic purposes such as landscaped gardens also attracted their attention. By the beginning of the Mediaeval Age, Sri Lanka had produced some of the most remarkable water gardens in Asia. The water gardens at Sigiryia, now declared a World Heritage Site and described by archaeologists as “one of the oldest landscaped gardens in the world”, is, in the final analysis, a harmonious synthesis of hydraulic engineering, landscape gardening and aesthetic finesse. 

Photo by Sanjini De Silva

Women use irrigation water for domestic purposes, house gardens and cottage industries. Recognizing these multiple uses in water development and management would greatly benefit women.