

Gender Gaps, Governance Gaps – A View of Sri Lankan Water Management

Kusum Athukorala¹

Introduction

The World Water Assessment Program (WWAP) of UNESCO plans a series of World Water Development Reports as a “living document” to track and report on progress in devising new assessment tools and policies. The World Water Development Report (WWDR), which would be then continuously updated, would provide an authoritative picture of the state of the global freshwater resources and water stewardship. The first WWDR, scheduled to be presented to the Third World Water Forum in 2003, would

- Focus on case studies to demonstrate the analytical approach
- Report on initial suite of key water sustainability indicators
- Begin work to integrate water-related and socio-economic indices.

The WWAP analysis has proposed to concentrate on ten challenge areas of water resources management. It was suggested that this paper should focus the present status of gender issues in water resources management, with respect to the challenge areas, with special reference to the Ruhuna Basin, in Southern Sri Lanka, wherever possible. The Ruhunu river basins selected for this study includes Menik Ganga, Kirindi Oya and Walawe Ganga river basins.

The lower portions of these basins lie in the Southern Province while the three rivers flow through the South-East Dry Zone. This area is reputed as a water-short region with a substantial part of the zone is covered by forests and wild life reserves.

The institutions involved in water management includes Irrigation Department, Irrigation Management Division, Department of Agrarian Development, Provincial authorities and the Department of Agriculture. The Uda Walawe Scheme in the Walawe Basin is managed by the Mahaweli Authority. The National Water Supply and Drainage Board (NWSDB) and Pradeshiya Sabhas(local authorities) are involved in domestic water supply.

Gender Aspects of WWAP Challenge Areas

The TOR for the paper highlights several challenge areas, of which is planned to focus on a selected few. It would be necessary to start with the last item indicated on the list, problems, opportunities and threats.

The most critical problem encountered was that there was hardly any data available on gender and water issues especially relating to the Ruhuna basin. Even a study which was carried out in Ridiyagama by IWMI in 1998 was listed but unavailable in the library.

Further more there is a remarkable paucity of data on gender in almost all the water management projects carried out in Sri Lanka, inspite of ten years of reference to the Dublin-Rio principles of

¹ Associated Development Research Consultants, Sri Lanka.

IWRM and the listing of gender as a issue by various donors and financial institutions. The gender principle was seen as a non-issue and gender desegregated data, the basis for gender sensitive decisionmaking was noticeably scarce. Some references to women in development (WID) was sketchily available. A few studies made reference to gender but it is difficult to see a focussed effort on either WID or gender.

The TOR calls for development of indicators related to gender. In order to do so there needs to be a substantial body of literature including quantitative assessments. Perhaps more than all the other areas covered in the Sri Lanka by the WWAP Reports, gender has been viewed a 'grey' area which has not come to the policymakers' and researchers attention. In the case of Sri Lankan water resources management, gender and water has long been the 'Cinderella' subject which inspite of some sporadic attempts to mainstream gender analysis has not seen substantial progress.

Gender or WID has been referred to more frequently in projects in the water supply sector, especially in the rural water supply but rarely referred to in the irrigation and environment sectors (Athukorala 1996) It is seen that domestic water supply is seen as part of 'traditional' women's work and therefore the cultural barriers for participation, both from the point of view of policy makers and communities was lesser (Jackson, C. in Merrey and Bhaviskar 1998) The ADB Water Policy states supportively of the above as follows regarding prevalence of gender :

Not enough progress has been made in this area and more gender specific data is needed in the water sector. Although gender issues in water supply, sanitation and hygiene are well researched and implemented, good practices in connection with water and land rights, and in resource management and conservation have not been widely adopted. (ADB 2001)

Due to the very short time frame and resources given for compilation of this paper, it was not possible to carry out a more exhaustive search of secondary sources for further possible data. Two sources of gender disaggregated data pertaining to involvement of women in water related decisionmaking in farmer organisations were located from the Dept of Agrarian Development and the Dept of Agriculture (Annexures 1 and 2) but due to various constraints it was not possible to include more specific data related to the Ruhuna Basin. It is hoped to be able to obtain this information for the final draft of the paper.

Due to the paucity of specific data, this paper draws heavily on secondary sources and the author's experience in numerous gender and water field studies in the rural communities and irrigated settlements of Sri Lanka from 1988 onwards. In particular a qualitative longterm study of 90 families in three irrigation systems in 1993-96, carried out as part of the International Irrigation Management Institute's (IIMI) Gender Program, Sri Lanka Gender Case Studies (SLGC) examining linkages between gender and irrigation was valuable in expanding the understanding of this 'grey' area through intrahousehold analysis.

In addition to the experiences of SLGC in Kalankuttiya (KL) in Mahaweli System H and Rajangane (RG) and Gampola RajaEla (GRE) this paper makes use of observations from field studies carried out in Sri Lankan irrigation systems including field work carried out in the small tank systems of North Central Province, Huruluwewa (NCP) and Ridiyagama in Southern Province (SP). a survey of the role of women in irrigation systems in 7 major irrigation systems as well as a study focussing on microcredit in Moneragala and Giribawa.

The purpose of this paper is to highlight the need to qualitatively assess a 'grey' area prior to building up indicators. It is assumed that globally there is a paucity of data on gender and water.

The WWAP exercise will therefore be of critical importance in focussing attention on the importance of a gendered approach, identifying gaps in knowledge, and building up a knowledge base on gender and water.

Background

The gender ideology in relation to water management is largely seen to be shaped by the social values related to irrigated agriculture coming in the wake of significant advances of the hydraulic civilization, the foundation of Sri Lankan culture. While modernization, diversification of income sources and lifestyles has brought changes in its status, the primary importance of rice cultivation for livelihood security especially in the major irrigated settlements of the, as yet mainly rural Sri Lanka continues to be unchanged.

Traditionally rice cultivation was ruled by gender specific norms which gave preeminence to men's labour and indeed placed strictures on women, citing traditional notions of the pollutive nature of women as a cause for such constraints. This ideology is seen to be as yet relatively unchanged in some traditional purana villages. In the irrigated settlements of Sri Lanka the social rules governing traditional villages was somewhat relaxed. With participatory irrigation management being adopted in the past two decades by decisionmakers, the dominant ideology was however as yet governed by adherence to traditional norms.

Social dynamics within Sri Lankan society are being shaped by catalytic changes such overseas employment and the influx of female labour into the export promotion zones. However within the rural sector, 40% of the agricultural workers in Sri Lanka are yet women and more than 70% of this group are unpaid family labour. Of the total enrollment in farmer pension schemes, 23.5 % are women. Casualties due to the Northern and Southern civil conflicts and may have impacted on the rise of female headed households to a point where one fifth to one quarter is female headed. The percentage of female headed household has risen from 18.8 % in 1992 to 21.4% in 1994 - for the first quarter only (Census and Statistics 1995, Athukorala 1996). This rate may be higher if data from the conflict area is taken in to account.

The notion of gender was in the first instance introduced by externally funded projects and therefore continues to suffer due to negative connotations of western feminism. Gender analysis is seen by its critics as a fashionable donor driven agenda which is not appropriate to the Sri Lankan culture. At the other extreme, projects often pay lip service to gender principles simply to qualify for donor funding. Gender was and is still often misconstrued as being synonymous with women. Another related fallacy is to view women as a homogenous group; nevertheless variables such class, level of income and sometimes caste are as yet very significant especially in defining access to water and decisionmaking fora.

The focus of this paper is the impact of gendered participation related to water management especially in relation to irrigated agriculture which is of critical importance to livelihood security and the well-being of families in the Ruhuna Basin.

Governing water wisely – who are the stakeholders?

As mentioned earlier, women are more readily acknowledged as stakeholders in water supply schemes (Attanayake and Shantasiri, 1996). However IMT related studies frequently remark on poor participation of women in FO activity (Athukorala and Zwartveen 1994, Zwartveen 1994, Athukorala 1996). The success of a participatory management program depends on the ability of

the farmer organisations (FOs) to mobilise stakeholders to carry out relevant functions and fulfil the above listed expectations. Participatory management implies that all stakeholders, men and women alike have equitable access to the decision making in order to optimise good governance.

The persons who derive livelihood security from irrigated agriculture in a system are not only the legal landholders but also include leaseholders (both legal and illegal), encroachers, traditional and non traditional 'ande' sharecroppers. All these groups are stakeholders in so far as they are dependent on irrigated water and cultivate irrigated land as sole or significant part of their livelihood strategies as well as contributing to the productivity of the systems. Therefore good governance encompasses the marginalized in irrigation systems who are often disregarded in qualitative assessments as they do not fall into the category of land holders. Women are usually among the poorest.

Participation which gives voice and choice to stakeholders especially the marginalized is the key factor underlying successful water governance. If FOs are to assume all the functions and roles that they are expected to assume, one crucial issue to be considered is the need to optimise stakeholder participation which then brings us to the question - who should be represented through FOs and be thus involved in water governance?. There are various possibilities:

Legal landholders – One problem encountered with granting FO membership status to legal landholders, is the problem of lands belonging to absentee landlords. These are worked either through sharecropping arrangements or leasing. The sharecroppers and leaseholders may not be involved in O&M activities organised by the FO.

Actual cultivators – The group of actual cultivators includes at least some of the legal landholders (those who cultivate the land themselves), the second generation settlers who are leasing land from their parents, other leasees (both from within the system as well as from outside the system) and encroachers. It also includes those who assist the landholder in cultivating the fields, e.g. the family members, hired laborers and attam laborers. The responsibility for cultivation may also vary according to crop, gender and system. In the Yala (Dry Season) chillie cultivation in Kalankuttiya was seen as female labour intensive as against Maha (Wet Season) paddy cultivation in the same system

Irrigators – The group of irrigators includes landholder-cultivators, family members of the landholder, hired and attam (reciprocal labour) laborers and friends or relatives who are asked to irrigate the plot.

Providers of labor for maintenance – Among the people that provide labor for maintenance are the legal landholders and their family members, leasees and their families, and agricultural laborers.

Farm managers - decisionmakers which would include some landholders, leasees, family members of landholders and *Ande* farmers (sharecroppers).

This list of potential membership criteria already shows that there are a large number of different people involved in the tasks and responsibilities related to irrigation, irrigated agriculture and irrigation management. The landholder is not necessarily the cultivator; actual cultivation is often done by combining the skills, experience and labor of a number of people; the task of irrigating may be done by someone who is not the landholder; the task of maintaining the canals and decisions regarding these tasks are often not concentrated in one person. This brings us to the question of studying whether there is any way of deciding which of these tasks or qualifications is

more important with respect to participatory management and involvement in FOs? Who should FOs represent and whom do they represent? Which stakeholders should they facilitate and which groups should have access to the FO? Are there any constraints which operate against participation of either gender?

In reality, the problem of FO membership and representation is often solved at the local level. Various arrangements arise, based on the judgement of the leadership and the communities involved. In some FOs, for example, leasees and tenants, the operators of land irrespective of tenurial rights are invited to participate in FO meetings. Some are allowed to join not as full members but in a form of 'associate membership', where they have the right to attend meetings, to participate in discussions and to receive information. Associate members in some instances are denied the right to vote in some systems.

In most FOs, membership criteria evolve in a way that is acceptable to most people concerned. What is striking, however, is that whatever the actual criteria for membership that are being applied or adhered to, women are rarely considered as potential members of FOs by the agencies involved as possible partners of participatory management.

Although currently gender desegregated data linking landownership and FO membership is not available with the key line agencies dealing with water management, the Dept of Irrigation and Mahaweli Authority, all previous studies in IMT have observed that in most FOs, participation of women generally is very low. Is it that female landowners are rare in irrigation systems? Is it that FO participation is defined as participation in the meetings and not in O&M? Are women not eligible to become members, even if they are landholders in their own right according to the criteria defining FO membership? Or is it that they are not particularly interested in participating in FOs? All these questions are very relevant to governance.

The answers to these questions cannot be easily answered using currently available sources of information though they are essential to understanding gendered participation in water management. Some conclusions can be drawn from the scanty information in the Annexures that women's participation is seen to be important if appropriate monitoring tools are devised. However even the unanswered questions constitute useful signposts for future action from the WWAP.

Securing the food supply – who controls land and water?

Legal landholders – There are no reliable readily available data available in Sri Lanka about the number of female landholders as compared to the number of male landholders. An estimate would be that the percentage of female landholders is somewhere between 20 - 40%. Many of those female landholders in the systems studied for SLGC are not original allottees but widows, who have inherited the land from their husbands. However in Mahaweli System H there are also a number of women who had been originally allocated land at the time of settlement.

Actual cultivators – What is the role played in irrigated agriculture by men or women? The traditional concepts of labour participation, with its strong connotation of religio-agro rituals have now given way before the forces of commercialism and modernization. Within the past decade in particular, women's participation in certain tasks hitherto constrained due to the perception of ritual pollution has been gradually changing in non-traditional areas as land preparation and threshing. Currently the involvement of women is noted as being extended over

the traditional boundaries and involve breaking of century old gender norms especially in settlement schemes.

There are regional differences in the nature and degree of men's and women's participation in irrigated farming. While the traditional gender tasks defining gender ideology are yet in place in the wet zone where women engage in only transplanting and infilling with some input into actual irrigation, the forces of modernization and economic necessity are seen as propelling communities towards greater change in the dry zone irrigated settlements. Their actual involvement in agriculture related activities is also reflective of the socio-economic position of the household.

In the Dry Zone systems of the North Central Province, there is hardly any gender division of labor anymore, almost all tasks can be done by both men and women. The observed exception is the subtask of plowing within land preparation which is still seen as a predominantly male task and transplanting which is still a predominantly female task. Most women interviewed for SLGC agree that tasks which involve bending the back for a long period of time such as transplanting are not favoured by men. The harvesting and gathering of sheaves is shared while transporting to the threshing ground is usually a male task due to the weight of the bundles. In cultivating OFCs, the involvement of women is higher than in paddy cultivation, since women are believed to be better in cultivating crops which need more intensive attention such as chillies, tomatoes and onions. In the dry zone systems, the female participation in Yala is seen as very high in all tasks as chillie is the predominant crop for the seasons and this is a female labour intensive cultivation. Even such tasks as spraying pesticides for OFCs is sometimes carried out in KL by women. This is usually in the face of societal disapproval and their own husbands' prohibition as they want to save the expenditure incurred on wage labour as well their confidence in their own ability to do a thorough job.

In the past in traditional villages women did not enter the threshing ground until the paddy had been measured due to fears of as it was feared that pollutive nature of women may affect the harvest (Leach 1971). More older and conservative farmers recalled the fact that in their traditional "purana" village homes, women were even forbidden to walk through the ripening paddy fields which was seen as a male domain. The entry of women to the threshing ground is now seen as being ignored mainly but not solely by female headed households and female landowners. Traditional gender ideology in this instance is perceived as being eroded by financial constraints experienced by farming communities.

There are a number of households in irrigated settlements where the actual farmers are women whose husbands are involved in other activities, sometimes outside the system. Some are recognised as almost solely responsible for all farming and irrigation activities and decisions and as the better farmer by the community. As female landowners, they express a keen interest in the water management and agency decisions. Yet, even some of these women have limited their participation in Farmer Organisations thereby being unrepresented in vital decisionmaking. .

It is seen that in the every system researched the nature of gender tasks for which labour is hired is a very reliable indicator of prevailing gender norms. The use of female family labour in non traditional tasks for work in own land is not seen as a major contravention of norms. But in the use of hired labour both the contractor and contractee is seen to approximate to the norms subscribed to in that system. In RG and KL gangs of 'contract women' work on land preparation including non traditional tasks such as levelling and building bunds. In GRE the only tasks that women engage in as hired labour is transplanting and infilling, in keeping with the traditional gender ideology prevalent in the system. In the systems studied in the Ruhuna Basin, planting,

infilling and harvesting was seen as tasks for hired female labourers but hired labour women were not used for land preparation. There seems to be a difference in the gender norms relating to labour participation in the wet zone systems and the dry zone, the North Central Province and the Southern Province. However, this area needs further study to be established.

Sharing water - who are the Irrigators?

Traditionally, irrigation is conceived as a male task as it is part of irrigated agriculture long seen as a male domain. However, in RG and KL, there are many examples of women being involved extensively in the task of irrigating. There are even cases of women doing night irrigation in the Dry Zone systems especially KL though women would usually try to trade rotations in order to avoid going out at night. Women's involvement in irrigation is seen as higher in KL and that too for chillie cultivation in Yala.

Apparently here, the task of irrigating has lost its solely male connotation. Husband and wife may go together to irrigate their fields, or sometimes they go separately depending on the workload. In some households, irrigating has become the sole responsibility of either the man or the woman. In RG as well as in KL, women appear to be concerned than their husbands about the adequacy and equity of water deliveries and are knowledgeable about rotations and water delivery. They share the task of irrigating and even if they do not themselves irrigate, women often go to the fields to monitor the flow of water to the field and to make sure that they receive the proper amount.

A remarkable feature of women irrigators is that while ensuring their access to water, they often express concern about their neighbours in the field getting sufficient water. This is seen as a concern growing out of their social networking process as poor and marginalized women access the generosity of the wealthier neighbours in troubled times and it is the women as housewives who have to handle such requests for attention.

Providers of labor for maintenance – In Rajangane and Kalankuttiya, maintenance is seen as a joint responsibility. and is often carried out by women, men and children together. Richer households and leaseholders may hire laborers, and some households also arrange for 'attam' (reciprocal labour) to carry out maintenance tasks.

Farm managers/decisionmakers – Especially among the wealthier farmer families, women are seen to play a significant role in the management of agricultural and agriculture related enterprises. In rich and middle income families it is also observed that joint decisionmaking is more common.

Households in which either men or women are solely responsible; households in which most decisions pertaining to irrigated farming are taken jointly by husbands, wives and sometimes adult children.

In all socio-economic groups, women are seen to play a key role especially in the domain of financial management and decisionmaking in irrigated agriculture. Women are seen to be active in financial accounting for domestic and production purposes, in arranging giving and taking loans within the community, though not in negotiating with banks. They are foremost in organising and mobilising savings and often maintain secret savings which are made available to the family in times of crisis. They are seen to take the lead especially in settlement schemes of accessing agri-financing and mobilizing labour using their social networks. Their characteristic involvement in this area of irrigated agriculture make them an important asset to FOs.

Governing water wisely - why is it that women stakeholders are not more involved in FOs?

When the present functioning of FOs is examined, it is often noted by researchers and line agency officers that the participation of women stakeholders is seen to be limited. However it must be admitted that some recent studies indicate that the participation of men in FOs is poor too (SLGC, HARTI/IIMI 1997)

This paper seeks to examine the reasons for limited female participation in FOs with its resultant impact on governance and valuing of water by posing the following possible responses.

1. Women are not involved because they are not interested

Limited participation at kanna meetings and FO meetings are often recorded and construed as the lack of interest of women in FO activities. If women are not eager to participate, it is because they may perceive the FO as not functioning properly or adequately serving their needs. This is moreover a factor which may affect male and female non-participation. However it could be that they have more effective means of receiving the same benefits without actual participation. For example they may not feel the need to actually participate if they feel that they can receive the same information through a family member, relation, FC representative or neighbour and if their needs could be thus represented. Women are seen to favour presenting their needs directly to decision makers in the irrigation line agencies, even without attending FO meetings because they seem to prefer this mode of contact and one-to-one interaction. There is marked reluctance for several reasons to present their needs in the formal setting of the FO meeting.

They are seen to be interested in the decisions taken at FO meetings in order to understand how it impinges on their respective households. Even when their husbands or male representatives do not volunteer information, women are seen to be keen on having full details. (The degree of interest is higher in systems where the sole livelihood is irrigated agriculture - KL and RJ - than where irrigated agriculture is not the focus of livelihood security such as GRE).

2. Women are not involved in FOs because of the lack of time.

This is certainly true of women as they are seen to put in longer hours of work because of their responsibilities within agricultural production as well as domestic tasks. Consequently the decision to attend meetings becomes more difficult for women than men. Especially for female heads of households, the difficulty is compounded by the critical need to obtain information and present their problems. When the anticipated benefits are high, women are seen to make an effort, at the expense of other activities to attend FO meetings .

Those women who attend meetings are somewhat critical of the manner in which the meetings are conducted. They find the duration of the meetings too long, the discussions are protracted unnecessarily, most representatives are male, often there is a rough and argumentative atmosphere in which they are not comfortable and cannot present their case adequately. Then the perceived benefits of the meeting may not be seen as sufficient to outweigh the losses incurred in participating.

3. Women cannot afford the economic loss involved in participation in the FO meetings

This is true for a number of women, especially female heads of households. But it also holds true for many men as well. The cost of participation may be too high to bear especially for the poorer stakeholders. It is seen that many FO office bearers have at least a relatively higher than average level of income and are often drawn from the village elite.

4. Husbands or other men (neighbours, sons, relatives) are able and willing to represent women landholders at meetings; therefore they do not need to attend FO meetings

This is true of most cases though KL had several significant instances of female landholders preferring to represent their case themselves. Especially women with younger children to look after may opt for alternative representation because their heavy domestic work load. Also older women landholders who experience difficulties in getting about may prefer to send sons to represent them. In most cases, female landholders are allowed by the FO to be thus represented. However husbands and male representatives are not always seen to adequately report back to women landholders; and women thus represented cannot adequately participate the discussions of issues that affect their lives.

This marginalisation of a significant group from direct decisionmaking and the subsequent lack of information may have a negative impact on the management of the whole system. From the FO point of view, it faces the disadvantage in not being able to tap the knowledge and experience of women stakeholders who are experienced farmers. From the agency point of view, key management decisions are not reaching a substantial group of stakeholders or are distorted in the process.

5. Women are not interested in taking up office in FOs

Very few women are seen to have taken up office in FOs at all compared to their dynamic involvement in other village level organisations such as savings and credit groups and funeral assistance societies (Athukorala 2001). However they seem more ready to take up the responsibilities of Field Canal representative rather than at the higher level of the Distributory Canal Organisation. This may be due to the fact that they feel they can balance it with their household and agricultural responsibilities as it does not entail travel to meetings outside the village.

Also the involvement of women in FOs is noted to have been higher in certain irrigation systems due to a combination of other variables. It was also observed during field surveys in 1992 and 1993 that in Huruluwewa, where the IMD project manager followed a policy of actively encouraging female involvement in FOs, a higher degree of participation was recorded with instances of women taking on office even at DC level in the FOs, especially in systems where that the educational status of the women is high and there is high male outmigration in the village.

The same high levels of participation of female officebearers was noted in Ridiyagama in 1998 where as in common with those women officer bearers interviewed in Huruluwewa in 1995 and 1998 (Athukorala 1995, Seneviratne 1998) and Ridiyagama in 1998.

(Athukorala 1998) cite the encouragement received by the Project Manager of the Irrigation Management Division as the sole reason for taking up office. But it is also noteworthy that all these women who were seen as involved as office bearers have had higher than average educational status in the systems; in some cases they have had a previous history of participation in community organisations or political organisations. All have high status within the village, having built up social capital through maintaining good interpersonal relationships with the community. They are generally older women whose families are grown up thus releasing them from at least part of their reproductive tasks connected with younger children and whose economic status is relatively high, releasing them from the necessity of engaging in wage labour.

6. Women feel diffident about actively participating in male dominated FO forums

The prevailing gender ideology as it relates to irrigated agriculture especially paddy cultivation has influenced the participation of women in FOs. Somehow irrigation and agriculture related meetings continue to be seen as a male domain especially when there are no positive signals from agency officials. . Women usually tend, to go together for FO meetings and refrain from participation if there are no other women participants. It is seen that women participate in a much more active manner in other organisations such as savings and credit groups and funeral assistance societies.

Again men are seen to perceive FO activities especially as office bearer as an enhancement of their social status and a contribution to the community. They tend to use the term “samaje sewa” (social service) to describe their FO involvement. Even when their husbands are involved as FO representatives women tend to focus more on the practicalities of the situation and the advantages that such an involvement may bring. For instance they see that it would create an opportunity for interaction with the line agency officers and thereby improve their access to services.

Strengthening the Knowledge base - What are the constraints to female participation and sharing of experience?

When the functioning of participatory management systems is studied we need to define the following factors which are seen to influence female participation in FOs - sociocultural perception of women's roles by communities and line agency decisionmakers.

Both the above factors combine to place constraints on the participation of women in FOs. Line agencies often tend to assume that stakeholders, farmers, users are all men and work on these parameters. It is rarely that an attempt is made to bring about the conditions which enhance female participation in FOs by explicitly encouraging and creating conditions which would facilitate this process. This approach is strongly dictated by the fact that the establishments of FOs have been in many instances been undertaken as part of irrigation rehabilitation project. (ADRC/ECL 1992; Kome 1997) In all the three SLGC systems participatory management had been introduced as part of the package for system rehabilitation. Line agencies also tend to overlook female landholders from training programs etc on the assumption again that most of these irrigation related training would be more useful for men and that women are not and would not be interested in obtaining these training as they do not irrigate. Both these assumptions are seen as needing to be reviewed according to available field data.

This situation is due to the entrenched assumption that irrigation is primarily a male field of operation. This seems to be an instance where attitudes of line agencies merely reinforce a sociocultural norm which serves to operate as a barrier against female involvement in

decisionmaking. But in reality these norms are already been eroded and the community has to a greater or lesser extent accepted the shifting of gender responsibilities. Other such constraints are seen in the belief that the womens' place is in the home where reproductive activities are seen to be given prominence. Her contribution to agricultural production and her involvement in decisionmaking is sidelined. This has detrimental impact on her contribution to the livelihood security of the community as well as sharing her knowledge gained through experience.

This is sharp contrast to other activities in rural communities especially the field of micro credit . In a 2001 study of microcredit it is seen that in irrigation systems of Moneragala and Giribawa women are the most active and successful group in microcredit organisations and play a prominent role even outside the community. But there is no corresponding activity in the crucial decisionmaking forum related to water.

Why should Sri Lankan water management agencies develop a gender perspective in their programs in Ruhuna Basin and elsewhere?

A gendered approach enables to highlight women's often 'invisible work' and their contribution; therefore this recognition will help build support female involvement in irrigated agriculture by creating a supportive environment. It will lead to an improvement of efficiency by involving more stakeholders in decision making and improving the two way flow of information. By supporting the principle of equity, community empowerment will lead to sustainable development, as enunciated in the Dublin-Rio principles.

A constraint of any supportive policy changes possible in achieving gender equity is that no study has yet been carried out to examine the financial losses incurred if any, due to limited participation in FOs for men and women, emphasising on the differential impact on female headed households. Nor has an extensive study on the impact of changing gender norms on irrigated agriculture and FO participation has not been undertaken by any organisation. The lack of a sound data base will continue to hamper the recognition of a gendered reality.

The role of women in water related decisionmaking is very different to their participation in decisionmaking related to other areas such as microcredit (Athukorala 2001). This stems from the dominant gender ideology which still maintains the primacy of men in water related economic activities especially rice cultivation

Field observations also indicate that farmer organisations are in a large number of cases been viewed by FO leaders as the stepping stone to involvement in local government politics. In spite of its high profile female political leaders, the number of women in politics is very low in Sri Lanka and therefore involvement of women in FOs may see the rise of a new generation of local level female political leadership rooted in the grassroots reality.

What then needs to be done to establish/improve gendered participation in water resources management, including the Ruhuna Basin?

The situation calls for a three pronged strategy, at agency, community and national level. The actions thus outlined can also be used to develop indicators for monitoring..

1. At agency level

Agencies and projects affecting the water sector, including those usually housed in the environment and watershed management sectors have been notably remiss in developing management tools in the form of gender disaggregated data (Hennayake et al 1997). Even during the very short time frame given for preparation of this paper, it was clear that there was no systematic management information available.

One instance where a gender specific data base being regularly updated was in the World Food Program sponsored project run by the Dept of Agrarian Development where a gender action plan had been developed. The other gendered data set being maintained in the Dept of Agriculture was set up in the course of a pilot project sponsored by the Commonwealth Foundation. Both data sets are being maintained by female professionals who are the Gender Focal Points nominated by their respective organisations to work with the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Both data sets are related to decisionmaking in farmer organisations and represent the initial step towards systematic gendered data management related to water users. They are important pathfinders for other agencies who work with water users.

2. At Community Level

Field officers need to be given a clear understanding of gender analysis through gender sensitizations. Participation of women in decisionmaking from the agency at community levels is as important as participation of women in water user organisations at community level. Gender scans and gender audits for new programs and projects need to be introduced.

3. At national and policy level

All water related policies should include a gendered perspective. For example the current draft Sri Lanka National Water Resources Policy should be strengthened to more strongly encompass women's productive uses of water. In fact the critical indicator at the present time is to list explicit mention of gender in all water resource development policies.

The above will be reinforced and also feed back in to the development of a gendered perspective at global level.

The tendency to view the gendered role in water management as more centred on women reproductive roles, more traditionally viewed with the water supply sector is ironically reflected beyond Sri Lanka, for eg. in the calendar issued for 2002 by the WWAP itself. The pictures in the WWAP calendar itself is a perpetuation of gender stereotypes as it refers to women's reproductive roles - carrying water, washing and bathing children. There is an urgent need to positively review the role of women in the irrigation sector, which is the largest user of water. as a means of fostering economic empowerment.

Finally the suggestions above argues for the inclusion of gender analysis be considered in water management initiatives as a tool for promoting livelihood security in this sector.

The WWAP is now strategically positioned to highlight the grey area in relation to gender and water and also effect the greatest lasting impact and service to the sector. Altering gender discriminative customs and norms in Sri Lanka and elsewhere will not happen without a concerted effort. The WWAP report can be the catalytic factor in highlighting gender and water.

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Annexure 1

Gender Participation in Farmer Organisations, Dept of Agriculture.

Divisional Secy Div	Basin	No of Farmer Org	Men	Women
Hambantota Dist				
Ambalantota	Walawe	45	1224	299
Suriyawewa	Walawe	25	1040	226
Tissamaharama	Kirindi Oya	28	1043	353
Lunugamvehera	K'Oya/Malala Oya	53	3905	754
Badulla Dist				
Ella	Kirindi Oya	33	723	446
Haldummulla	Walawe/K' Oya	20	330	550
Haputale	Walawe	24	335	770
Ratnapura Dist				
Balangoda	Walawe	26	1065	80
Embilipitiya	Walawe	18	1020	312
Godakewela	Walawe	421	1523	406
Imbulpe	Walawe	30	1548	255
Kolonne	Walawe	33	1382	227
Weligepola	Walawe	29	1005	75
Moneragala Dist				
Badalkumbura	Menik Ganga	42	1671	521
Buttala	Menik Ganga	35	2018	388
Kataragama	Menik Ganga	17	680	500
Sevenegala	Walawe	-	-	-
Tanamalwila	Walawe	60	6748	859
Wellawaya	Kirindi Oya	23	4491	2161

Source : Information , Monitoring and Evaluation Division, Dept of Agriculture, 2001

Annexure 2

Women's Participation in Farmer organizations under Minor Irrigation schemes – World Food Program.

	Ratnapura	Badulla	Hambantota	Moneragala
Total no of Farmer Orgs	11	11	8	10
Total no members	928	783	300	835
Total no of women	206	214	68	381
Total no of men	724	569	232	454
Total Women as President	0	0	1	0
Total Women as Secretary	1	0	1	4
<i>Total Women as Treasurer</i>	2	0	2	3
Total other Comm Memb	15	15	15	15
Total in Exec Comm M/F	63	99	72	103
Total women Exec Comm	18	15	19	20
% of Female in FO	22	27	22	45

Source WFP program, Dept of Agrarian Development, 2000