

Women's Access to Multiple-use Water Services (MUS): An Agenda for African and South Asian Countries

Priyane Amerasinghe, Senior Researcher, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Hyderabad Office, India

Barbara van Koppen, Principal Researcher, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Southern Africa Office, Southern Africa

Water development is crucial to achieving a number of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). In achieving these goals, women farmers play a major part through their productive roles in agriculture as well their activities at household level. However, sectoral demands have envisioned water as a single-use commodity, and studies have shown that it has led to inequitable allocations, especially for poor women whose access to resources, assets and knowledge are already meagre. This paper highlights some of the important milestones made to date in improving equity in water allocations and discusses how multiple-use water services (MUS) can enhance not only the household well-being, but also women's productivity in agriculture.

Women in poor farming households play multiple roles and are in need of water for many of the diverse activities that they engage in. Studies across countries confirm that women often have limited access to water, whether they engage in household tasks, livestock rearing, fisheries, agriculture, home gardens or for small businesses that they undertake. Water sector investments often do not consider the multiple uses of a limited resource such as water, from a women's perspective. Thus, interventions in the water sector have not benefited women in any significant manner.

Recognition that a multiple-use approach to meeting water needs of the poor brings in multiple benefits, will thus be important. Such an approach is sustainable and will benefit women who have to use water for productive as well as other household purposes. Women's participation in water infrastructure development and management will help understand their water needs holistically, given the fact that women are not only farm workers, but also decision makers in crop production, livestock rearing, fisheries and forestry. Conducive policies for landownership (title deeds) leasing for long-term investments and water rights

will support women by helping to enhance income generation, and alleviate poverty and hunger. This will in turn increase the access to resources for production and marketing (inputs, credits and markets) as well as other income-generating activities. Access to water technologies (agriculture and domestic use) and production of user-friendly equipment (for women) will reduce drudgery and be an incentive for increasing production at farm level. This will contribute to the agricultural gross domestic product (GDP) of countries, while providing health and wealth benefits to the household. Continuous capacity building on multiple-use systems and women's productive potential will provide the necessary confidence and skills to manage the future water systems, not only to achieve food and nutritional security but to also ensure the overall well-being of the poor households.

Thus, access to capital assets that allow women to obtain water for their activities, provide financial assistance to be competitive where water markets operate, together with certification of women's skills and the right to own land through policy processes, will provide the necessary boost to these women farmers. Also, research on the poverty impacts of single- and multiple-use services will shed light on the different contextual requirements, and provide the evidence base to shape the policy processes in countries. Understanding the potential market for multiple-use systems will bring in investors, which will help diversify this concept and make accessibility to water a reality for poor women.

<http://www.apaari.org/events/activities-completed/gcwa.html>