



WOMEN IN WASH DECISION MAKING ROLES

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Introduction

Women should be included in decision making processes of WASH services. Participation means more than attendance at decision making meetings, but instead having the choice and ability to contribute at each stage of a programme.

This guide aims to introduce the challenges which programmes face when trying to incorporate women's participation in WASH programmes through being heard and playing key roles. It will then go on to describe actions to take, and will suggest indicators to measure how successful such actions have been.

This guide is intended as an introduction to these issues and as a landing page for further resources. This guide is strongly linked to the similar guidance notes on [Water User Groups](#) and [Community Mobilisation](#). This guide should be used alongside the guidance notes on [Gender and Sanitation](#) which aims to highlight the specific needs of women: dignity; security and menstrual hygiene management.

Being heard

Facilitating the voice of women has intrinsic value in making the women feel included and empowered but also instrumental value in improving WASH services and uncovering issues that may be hidden if a project only talks to the men. Women are more likely to know the difficulties accessing WASH services and the behavioural aspects around sanitations and hygiene, as in most cultures they are the primary WASH users at household level. Without including their voice in programmes, WASH facilities may be poorly designed, used and maintained.

WASH programmes need to address both the practical and strategic needs of women- not only meeting their WASH needs but also addressing the power imbalances between men and women¹. Changes to address women's strategic needs means challenging the cultural and social limitations (some of which are listed below) that underlie women's inequality.

'Women's participation in water programmes will not allow for women's empowerment unless power imbalances between women and men are addressed'².

¹ Willetts, J. Halcrow, G. Carrard, N. Rowland, C. Crawford, J. 2010. Making the Invisible Visible: Gender and Pacific Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Initiatives ONLINE [Accessed: 15/03/2016]. Available at: <https://opus.lib.uts.edu.au/bitstream/10453/13950/1/2009008515.pdf>

² Ivens, S., 2008. Does increased water access empower women? *Development*, 51(1), pp.63-67.

Practical needs: The material needs that men and women have for survival and economic development e.g. clean drinking water, safe disposal of waste. These do not challenge gender divisions or women's subordinate position in society.

Strategic interests: The non-essential interests that still affect everyday life through structural and cultural limitations e.g. women's voice in decision making, participation in WUG, ability to have choices. Strategic interests generally challenge matters of position, control and power.

³ Willetts et al 2010

Challenges

Actions and Outcomes

Indicators

Challenges:

Cultural limitations	<i>Male control</i>	While women are primarily responsible for water and sanitation provision in the home, men are more likely to make decisions around investment and finances and control asset distribution ⁴ .
	<i>Family practices</i>	In some societies pregnant women are prohibited from using a latrine. In others, daughters may not use the same latrine as their father or father-in-law ⁵ . These practices may not be obvious by just talking to men
	<i>Female inferiority</i>	Social seclusion in many societies also prevents women from having access to public and communal facilities ⁶
Social limitations	<i>Decision making</i>	Women often don't have the information, choice, or ownership to make decisions ⁷ . They may be prevented from even attending decision making meetings.
	<i>Confidence</i>	Due to women's status and often low literacy levels, Women often don't have the experience or confidence to make their voice heard ³ . There may also be cultural limitations which prevent women from speaking in front of men.

⁴ Coates, S. 1999. A Gender and Development Approach to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Programmes. WaterAid: Briefing paper

⁵ Coates 1999

⁶ Coates 1999

⁷ Coates 1999

³ Water and Sanitation Program (WSP) 2010. Gender in Water and Sanitation. WSP: Working Paper

Social limitations	<i>Taboo subjects</i>	Defecation and Menstrual Hygiene are often taboo subjects. Even where women are able to take part in decision making, the choice of subjects may be restricted ⁴ .
	<i>Household duties</i>	Women may not be able to take part in political life and decision making because of the time taken up by household duties ⁵
Structural limitations	<i>Water Users Group (WUG) membership</i>	Women often have the greatest interest in the operation and maintenance of WASH services but don't have sufficient influence on WUG or similar committees to ensure their upkeep. Therefore, they have to deal with poor water source protection, vandalism and poor construction ¹¹ . See the WUG guidance notes
	<i>Government</i>	These are not just problems at the local level, but national and international governments typically do not put as great an emphasis on sanitation and hygiene education as is needed and there is an under-representation of women ⁶ . This means there are often few policies that help women take part in decision making and there are few role models for women to aspire to

⁴ Mahon, T and Fernandes, M. 2010. Menstrual Hygiene in South Asia: a neglected issue for WASH programmes. *Gender and Development* (18)1 p.99-113

⁵ Tearfund n.d. Gender and Sanitation: breaking taboos, improving lives. Tearfund ¹¹ Coates 1999.

⁶ Tearfund n.d.



Richard Hanson/Tearfund

Photo: Women are primarily responsible for water collection

Challenges

Actions and Outcomes

Indicators

Actions and Outcomes

Outcome: Decision making and responsibility for water and sanitation are being shared equally by beneficiary women and men

In order to plan, design and implement an effective WASH project, women need to be intentionally included and the challenges (previously mentioned) minimalised. This section describes some positive outcomes and the actions needed to achieve the inclusion of women, women's contribution, and a respect for women's voices in WASH decision-making meetings.

The desired outcome of WASH programmes looking to include women in decision-making processes is for the responsibility for WASH services to be shared equally between male and female beneficiaries.

Key point to consider: Women's involvement in decision-making about water resources and in WASH programmes is critical to their empowerment, but it is important not to overburden them with additional unpaid work on top of their existing responsibilities⁷

Action: Active Participation of men and women

Facilitate the participation and inclusion of men and women to gain their different opinions and preferences⁸. Bear in mind the challenges that have been laid out above and the power dynamics in which women may or may not feel comfortable to speak. Practical actions should actively seek to minimise power imbalances and restrictions to speaking out.

⁷ Jansz, S and Wilbur, J (2013) Women and WASH. WaterAid: Briefing note

⁸ Water and Sanitation Program (WSP) 2010. Gender in Water and Sanitation. WSP: Working Paper

Practical activities include:

- Hold separate male and female sessions and split groups in Focus Group Discussions
- Use the local language and user-friendly material (think about literacy levels of men and women)
- Set meetings at a time and place suitable and convenient for men and women.
- Provide feedback mechanisms for complaints and challenges
- Work with local men and particularly male leaders to build their commitment and capacity to support women’s empowerment.

“Once they allow us to speak they usually listen to what we say. So being heard isn’t the issue so much as [gaining permission to speak]. Women before were never given space in meetings, this is a big change.” (Female community member in Fiji)⁹ (See case study below)

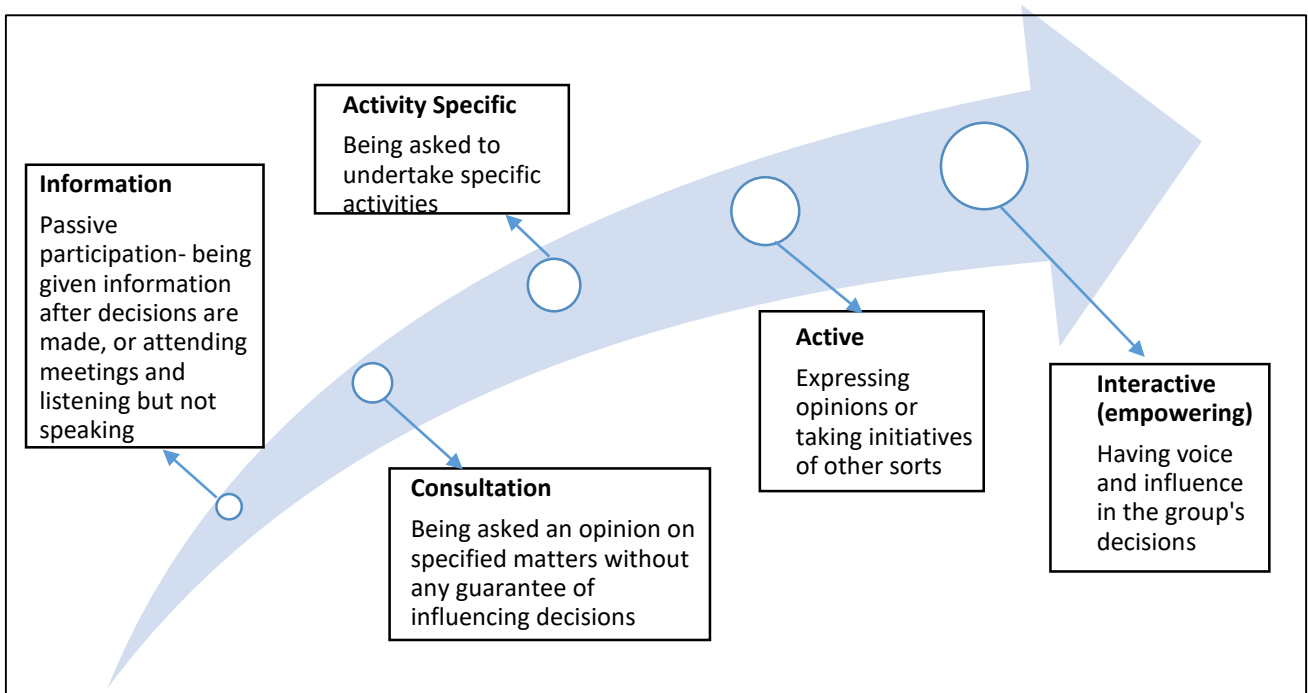


Diagram showing the different levels of participation. Information is lowest and interactive is the highest level of participation. All programmes should aspire to interactive participation that empowers women and men¹⁰

⁹ Halcrow G, Rowland C, Willetts J, Crawford J and Carrard N. 2010, Resource Guide: Working effectively with women and men in water, sanitation and hygiene programs, International Women’s Development Agency and Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney, Australia

¹⁰ Adapted from: Agarwal, B., 2001. Participatory exclusions, community forestry, and gender: An analysis for South Asia and a conceptual framework. *World development*, 29(10), pp.1623-1648.



Action: Gender sensitisation

Gender sensitisation is about people recognising and valuing the other gender. Facilitate discussion to allow the community to value the differences in WASH preferences between different groups—particularly men and women. Allow the community to recognise the different roles and responsibilities that men and women have in relation to WASH. If there is recognition and valuing of the work of women, this should lead to a fairer sharing of roles and work. Practical activities include:

- Use participatory tools and focus group discussions to achieve awareness of the different roles and responsibilities of men and women. Encourage men and women to talk about and work through their concerns
- The community must be made aware of the differing WASH needs between the two genders.
- Share stories of women and men from other villages where women have been part of community decisions and the resulting benefits to the community
- Sensitisation sessions should be facilitated by both men and women.

Research into the link between WASH service delivery and gender equality in the South Pacific showed that through gender sensitisation there were positive gender changes in the family and the community (see case studies below for further information):

“Now we have recognised the women’s labour and we respect them” (Male community member in Vanuatu)¹¹

“Men acknowledge the amount of work the women have done and their role. Men always talk. Women always do the work and are more committed to get things done. They take more responsibility. The change is the recognition and that they [men] see they need to share the labour and recognise the work and contribution.” (Man in Fiji)¹²

Action: Attempt to challenge the traditional gender perceptions

Enabling women to take part in WASH decision-making programmes can challenge traditional perceptions of gender roles and responsibilities within communities.

Involving women helps increase their self-confidence and self-belief, leading them to feel more empowered within the community. Women in decision-making roles can increase male respect for women, improving inter-gender relationships at both the community and household level. The work and contribution of women on WASH programmes can raise their value within the community and can challenge traditional gender perceptions.¹⁹

Look out for opportunities to discuss and challenge traditional gender perceptions:

- At the beginning of the project, don’t assume which roles or project activities men and women should be involved in. Instead encourage everyone to be involved in training opportunities in construction, maintenance or leadership.

¹¹ Halcrow et al. 2010

¹² Willetts et al. 2010 p.11

¹⁹ Willetts et al. 2010

- Deliberately create spaces for men and women to participate and be intentional about including men and women. Think about including quotas or targets for the ratio of men to women.
- Encourage male and female WASH staff to be role models. For example, encourage male staff to support female hygiene promoters or include women in the technical aspects of WASH services.

Case Study - Indonesia

The women of the Sewukan community in Java, Indonesia, took part in a consultation on community water systems. In spite of prejudice about women's lack of technical knowledge, women identified useful technical alterations to existing design errors, which were the basis of modifications to the new water system. Their voice was listened to and further improvements were made in the form of more equitable distribution of water supply and the addition of a sanitation facility¹³.

Challenges

Actions and Outcomes

Indicators

Indicators

Indicators measure the impact of a project and provide evidence that it is meeting its objectives. The table below gives examples of useful indicators for a project aiming to increase the impact of women's voice in decision making.

Participation	Attendance	% or # of women attending decision making meetings
Gender sensitisation	Awareness	% of men and women who are aware of the opposite gender's WASH preferences and responsibilities
Challenge gender perceptions	Men's perception	% or # of men that report that their perception of women has improved
	Women's perception	% or # of women that report an increase in the perception that their voice is being heard
Outcome	Contribution	Ratio of contributions in decision making meetings by women and men.
	Decision adopted	Ratio of decisions adopted from women and men's contributions in water and sanitation committee meetings

¹³ Fisher, J., 2006. For her it's the big issue: putting women at the centre of water supply, sanitation and hygiene. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: Evidence Report.

Case Studies - Vanuatu

In Vanuatu, World Vision used the PHAST (Participatory Hygiene and Sanitation Transformation) methodologies to incorporate gender sensitisation into WASH programmes. They successfully used participatory techniques to encourage communities to recognise the roles and responsibilities of women in WASH matters, and realise their knowledge in planning future WASH actions and managing current WASH facilities. Their approach was highly successful and resulted in many positive outcomes:

- At the household level men showed increased respect for their wives and supported them by becoming more active in household hygiene chores. Improved hygiene and health were attributed to women's contributions to the project. Fewer domestic arguments and violent cases were reported, due to enhanced capacity to meet water needs.
- Within the community the recognition for women's inputs to the WASH projects led to increased value for women and increased value of their contributions to decision-making. Members of the village remarked that this change in attitudes to women was the greatest outcome of the World Vision programme. The leadership roles which women were able to take on led to them building self-confidence, feeling more empowered and gaining self-respect, all of which helped to contribute to men becoming more supportive of women in the community.
- The above improvements in gender equality can be attributed to World Vision's approach to the programme in Vanuatu. It was inclusive and participatory, focused on the needs of children and women, was accessible
- (activities were made sure to be accessible to women in terms of time and location; activities were tailored to be suitable to community members with low literacy levels), and also provided support and training to both the male and female leaders and committee members¹⁴

Fiji

In Fiji a programme by several NGOs including Live & Learn, used an inclusive approach to involve women with WASH initiatives. Through participatory activities the program successfully enabled women to take on decision-making and leadership roles within the community. The community benefited from many positive outcomes:

- Men began to recognise and value the roles women played in WASH matters, both at the household level and at the community level. Women have improved relationships and have started working together which has led to increased respect and increased voice.
- Women began to feel able to voice their opinions on community health and sanitation and men began to listen. The needs of women were taken into account in WASH decision-making, leading to gains in community sanitation and health. This in turn led to further respect of women's inputs, resulting in greater sense of gender equality and female empowerment.
- The above-mentioned outcomes of the Fiji case study were successful due to the approach of Live & Learn. It was inclusive, responded to the real needs of the community, focused on

¹⁴ Willetts et al 2010

creating pride and satisfaction amongst community members, built on past projects and created positive long-term relationships to ensure sustainability¹⁵

Further links:

Halcrow G, Rowland C, Willetts J, Crawford J and Carrard N. 2010, [Resource Guide: Working effectively with women and men in water, sanitation and hygiene programs](#)- A useful resource for WASH programming staff to work with men and women and increase women's participation.

Summary

This short guideline has looked at the challenges which prevent women's voices from being heard during decision-making in WASH programmes; actions that can help to increase the value of women's voices in the community; and indicators to measure the success of these actions. The next short guideline will consider the difficulties of involving women in key roles throughout WASH projects.

Key Roles

Introduction

As well as having a voice in WASH programmes, women should be actively involved in the design, construction, promotion, and ongoing maintenance of facilities. In fact, one way of increasing the value of women's voices is by providing them with key roles within the WASH programme. In many cultures, men and women have different roles and responsibilities of WASH collection and promotion and this can be key in providing valued roles for both genders

There is a large variety of WASH service roles, some of which are listed here:

- Construction worker
- Water engineer or technician
- Pump attendant
- Latrine block attendant
- Fee collector
- Water User Group or Committee member or leader*
- Behaviour Change Communicator or Community Mobiliser*

*The roles involved with Water User Groups (WUGs) and Community Mobilisation are considered in separate guideline documents, which are listed at the end of this document.



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¹⁵ Willetts et al 2010

Generally, women are restricted from playing a key role in WASH service delivery due to cultural, social and organisational limitations. WASH programming should aim to overcome these challenges, be inclusive to women and work towards women’s empowerment and gender equality where possible.



Challenges:

The table below shows some of the various factors that limit women’s involvement in key roles related to WASH service delivery.

Cultural limitations	<i>Traditional gender based roles and responsibilities</i>	Women are often restricted from certain roles and responsibilities by cultural norms and values. While men are involved in the construction and technical advice, women do the physical labour and provide the housing and food for the team ¹⁶ . These gendered roles can increase the inferiority of women and their separation from public life
Social limitations	<i>Illiteracy and education</i>	A lack of literacy or education may limit a woman’s ability to take key roles in the construction and management of WASH facilities. Even where women are well educated, early gender streaming and stereotyping mean that girls are steered away from science, technology and engineering subjects in school ¹⁷ .
Organisational limitations	<i>Male bias</i>	Even within the organisation, there may be cultural or historical norms which lead to a male bias in technical areas ²⁵ . Accepting these norms marginalises female participants and presents a lack of role models
	<i>Logistics</i>	Women may also be put off because of field work where they have to travel with and stay overnight with male colleagues ¹⁸ .
Consequences	<i>Victimisation</i>	Where women do take on traditionally male roles, such as being on the WUG or being a pump mechanic, they may face emotional abuse such as being excluded, bullied or victimised, or becoming the subject of scorn. Women may even face physical violence and increased domestic abuse. WASH programming should recognise these risks and ensure ongoing monitoring ¹⁹ . For example: <i>In Kandy, Sri Lanka, the success of a</i>

¹⁶ Coates 1999

¹⁷ Jalal, I. 2014. Women, Water, and Leadership. ADB briefs (24) ²⁵
Jalal 2014

¹⁸ Jalal 2014

¹⁹ House, S. Ferron, S. Sommer, M. Cavill, S. 2014. Violence, Gender and WASH: A practitioner’s toolkit. London: WaterAid/SHARE

		<i>female led local water based Community Based Organisation aroused the jealousy of the men. The men spread malicious rumours and deliberately sabotaged the water infrastructure.²⁰</i>
	<i>Overburdening</i>	Women with added responsibilities on top of their everyday activities can become overburdened ²¹ and this can put some people off taking on key roles, or lead to women being unable to continue in the position.

Challenges

Actions and Impacts

Indicators

Actions and Outcomes:

The actions listed below are practical methods which could be incorporated into WASH programmes so that women become more able to play a key role in ensuring the delivery of WASH services within the community.

Outcome: Equal participation of men and women in WASH leadership

Action: Recognise who traditionally takes key roles in WASH services

- At the assessment stage, it should become clear who is normally involved in leadership and the roles in WASH service delivery.
- Determine how women's and men's participation and capacity building could change power dynamics at the household and community level²².

Action: Develop women's leadership and decision-making skills through training, mentoring, and skills building.

It is not enough to simply increase the number of women in community water groups, although a significant number of women is important. Both quantity and quality are essential components of leadership²³.

- Men and women can be trained in construction, operation and maintenance of all types of water and sanitation facilities, including wells and pumps, water storage, treatment, water quality monitoring, distribution systems, toilets and bathing facilities.

²⁰ Jalal 2014

²¹ WaterAid. 2013. Women and WASH. WaterAid: Briefing note

²² Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) 2006. Women, Girls, Boys and Men: Different Needs- Equal Opportunities. IASC ONLINE [Accessed: 15/03/2016] Available at:

<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/system/files/documents/files/Gender%20Handbook.pdf>

²³ Jalal 2014

- Plan the training, particularly for the women, considering the timing and language, as well as the trainee's previous education.

Case Study - India

In Jharkhand, India the existing pumps were frequently breaking down. Their maintenance relied on 4 mechanics who covered an area of 27 panchayats (villages) and it took up to a month for each pump to be repaired. Three of the poorest and most marginalised women from each community have been trained as hand pump mechanics to provide an immediate response. At the end of their training, they were provided with toolkits and bicycles to carry out their tasks. The work also helped build self-esteem and the economic independence of these women.

"In the beginning, villagers doubted our ability and credentials as mechanics, but after we repaired a couple of hand pumps they rested their faith in my team. They have stopped contacting the mechanics in the block. Now people respect us and look up to us as the technical experts. I feel we have a position in our Panchayat," (a team leader of a women mechanics group)²⁴

Outcome: Men recognise the value of women in key roles

Action: Facilitate discussion and training in communities to accept and promote women's leadership

- Intentionally include men and women in discussions around female leadership and key roles.
- Think about encouraging community groups and WUCs to have temporary special measures, quotas and targets of women in leadership and key roles

Case Study - Sri Lanka

In Kegalle District, Sri Lanka, women had to walk long distances to collect water, giving them little time for anything else. As part of an Asian Development Bank water project, women were trained in technical knowledge and capacity building to create a Community Based Organisation for improved access to water. Women took a leadership role in this and took on the burden of the work because water access was so important to them. Despite criticism from the men, the women persevered, and they gained respect from the success of the project.

"I must tell you how getting water empowered women not only by releasing them from the burden of water carrying, but the project also showed women that they are able to create something [that] is of so much value to society. It also gave them a feeling of achievement and self-worth." (Female water leader)²⁵

²⁴ Roy, S. 2009. Women Pump Mechanics on the Move. UNICEF ONLINE [Accessed: 14/03/2016] Available at: <http://unicef.in/Story/145/Women-hand-pump-mechanics-on-the-move>

²⁵ Jalal 2014

Indicators:

Indicators measure the impact of a project and provide evidence that it is meeting its objectives. The table below gives examples of useful indicators for a WASH project aiming to increase the involvement of women in key roles.

Participation	<i>Training attendance</i>	% or # of women involved in training, mentoring and skills building
	<i>Key roles</i>	% or # of men and women taking key roles e.g. pump mechanics, community health mobilisers
Perception	<i>Men's perception</i>	Men reporting increased value for women's contribution to WASH services
	<i>Women's perception</i>	Women reporting greater confidence to take on key roles in WASH service delivery

Summary:

This short guideline has looked at the challenges around women taking on key roles within WASH projects, actions which can help to increase their involvement with such roles, and indicators to help measure the impact of these actions.

Two documents outlining challenges, actions and indicators for gender sensitive programming concerned with [WASH and Gender: Community Mobilisation](#) and [Women and Water User Groups](#) are available.