

## Gender and Inclusion in WASH and IWRM<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction

Inequality between women and men of different categories persists, thus social inclusion is crucial in water management and in all projects. GWA promotes inclusion by asking people themselves for their specific needs and knowledge: “**giving the water user a voice**”.

This two-pager is intended to act as a reference point for mainstreaming gender and inclusion in WASH and IWRM with an empowerment approach.

### Conceptual Framework

**Inclusion:** take gender and diversity into account, because not one size fits all.

**Gender** refers to power relations between and amongst women, men, third gender, of different ages, living conditions, ethnic groups, ability, education, and religion.

**IWRM** refers to the management and development of water for all purposes, considering all needs and priority for drinking water, and the conservation of the planet in times of changing climate. Women are recognized as crucial in IWRM. IWRM includes WASH management.

**Empowerment** is the process in which different people take the decisions about their life into their own hands. There are four integrating elements: economic, political, socio-cultural and physical.



*People who lost their land through river-erosion now live in a cluster village*

### WASH and IWRM in Bangladesh

Since 2000, Bangladesh, with a population of between 160 and 200 million has kept up with the

population growth for water supply and made significant progress in sanitation facilities. According to the JMP (WHO/UNICEF-2017), who uses the data of the governments, 97% of people have access to drinking water, 55% to safe drinking water, whilst access to limited, basic and safely managed sanitation increased from 40 to 70%.

Policies, acts, laws and strategic plans include attention for gender and diversity, but, the practice is not always inclusive. The GoB mentions drinking water as first priority water use in the Water Act, and water in general as crucial for all sustainable development. This was reinforced by the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially SDG 6 in the 2015. Since the SDGs should be achieved leaving no one behind, gender and inclusion should be incorporated actively.

The most important gender and inclusion issues of WASH and IWRM in Bangladesh are:

### Water

Women and girls are responsible for water in the house, both in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. It hampers their opportunity to go for education or paid work outside.

In places, where water is polluted with arsenic and/or salinity, or the source of safe water is too far, women and girls have to walk far to fetch water. They then run the risk of falling or being violated.

If there is no free access to safe drinking water, it is women who need to pay for it. If the family has no monetary income, safe water is not available to them. For example, for local women household heads in the saline coastal belt, the available water from desalination plants is too costly for them.



*Drinking water in Bhola, Bangladesh*

<sup>1</sup> With photographs of Bhola, Bangladesh, made during Watershed Project fieldwork.

In times of disaster, the regular water supply and toilet will be out of order, and for women this means to go and find water elsewhere, usually far.

## Sanitation

For men, it is possible to find a place to relieve themselves. But women are more physically vulnerable and susceptible to germs, with internal genital organs, menstruation, pregnancy and giving birth. For them a sanitary toilet is very important.

When there are few toilets, users will have to walk far, which is hard for some people like the elderly, children, adolescent girls, pregnant women, differently abled, especially at night or during disasters. Therefore, a toilet close-by is very important.

The location of the toilet is also important. For example, the toilet should not be next to a road where many people pass by. It also should not be near to a bush or dark or hilly place where there is risk of danger.

The design and technology of toilets needs to take the differences between different users into account. Elderly and pregnant women need a high commode, while children need a lower commode, and people with disability need toilets adapted to their type of disability. Furthermore, women with disabilities have different needs from men with disabilities.

Menstruating women and girls need toilets with locks, waste bucket, a dry shelf to put sanitary things.

In many public places, such as markets, bus-stations, and in locations where many women work, there is no toilet for women. Sometimes the toilet is constructed but not separately for women and men, and not clean or locked. So, women still cannot use them.



*Training for Gender and Water Advocacy*

## Hygiene

Hygiene in toilets is more likely achieved if each family has their own. For shared facilities, cleaning rosters have to be made, which are hard to be kept.

For girls, not to drop out of school, it is important that there are toilets with Menstrual Hygiene Management facilities.

Schools should have separate hygienic toilets for boys and for girls. Also, School Sanitation and Hygiene Education (SSHE) should be compulsory in schools, including coaching with hand-washing.

Maintaining and cleaning the toilets should be gender-equal. If all users feel equally responsible it will ensure the sustainability of the toilets.

Toilets in refugee camps have specific requirements of hygiene and safety. Because many people, who did not know each other, live together and use the same toilet. There, people are more susceptible to germs and women are at risk of being harassed and raped. In such camps the location of the toilets is very important.

At the household level, hygiene is important for all, and women are mostly responsible for the health of the family: especially of children. If family members fall ill, women have to care for them, and have less energy themselves too, with less time remaining for paid work. This leads to poverty.

Whilst toilets are more important for women, it is men who decide about the household expenditure, often preferring other items above a toilet.

During disasters, with many people in cyclone shelters, women and men's sanitation and hygiene needs are different. There may be toilets, but usually not separate and not always functioning. Women rather stay in their house. This results in far higher numbers of women deaths than men resulting from disasters.



*Toilets are not all hygienic*

## IWRM

In IWRM, it is recognised that women's water management is crucial for all. Irrigation in agriculture is largely the work of men, and decisions regarding IWRM: the use of water for which purpose, are made by men. 96% of available fresh water in Bangladesh is used for agriculture (BBS), 2% for drinking water and households. Of course agriculture is important, but the limit is reached, and in the Barind track women have great problems finding water, with the wells dry during half of the year. This same region is the most rice producing area of the country. In the Water Act, the GoB shows clearly that drinking water is the first priority of all the uses. In Bhola river-erosion and cyclones have different impacts on women and men.

Also in Bangladesh fresh water is a scarce good, so the demands are competing critically. Bangladesh, the country with the highest population density in the world,

is self-sufficient in most food needs. So it is not surprising that a lot of water is needed for cropping. Even with huge rains during about 4 months, the groundwater is sinking annually and dramatically.

The most important forms of pollution of water are arsenic and increasingly salinity. Further there is pollution from industrial and agricultural sources. All forms have important aspects of gender and inclusion. Rich people can afford to buy drinking water. Resulting from increasing salinity, people (first men, and sometimes to be followed by women) decide to migrate to cities, where they will have water, and may find daily paid work.



A new DTW, green means: "no arsenic"

**Solid waste management (SWM)** is part of WASH and IWRM. Solid waste if not properly managed ends up in ponds and canals and rivers, which are used for domestic and even drinking water. Women and men have different positions in relation to waste. In the house-hold, ultimately women decide what is thrown away.



Fisher family, Bhola

## Conclusion

First, women are knowledgeable water managers regarding the availability and quality of water, therefore they need to be involved in all water-related decision-making from community to national level. Second, access to clean and improved sanitary toilets is more important for women than for men. Therefore, women need to be involved in technological options. In case a WASH committee is formed, women need to be in the leading positions. Often women's names are included, but they are not invited in the meetings or they are not listened to. Their true participation needs to be ensured. It is often seen that the poorest categories, widows, who live alone, cannot afford anything for tube-wells or toilets, because they have no income at all. Sanitation and hygiene topics are usually taboo subjects to discuss. One is not supposed to talk openly about issues of defecating, urinating, menstruation, pregnancy, etc. thus neglecting the importance for health of all. We should try to break this taboo in a decent way, using acceptable words, which respect dignity of women and men and everyone.

However, all over, the gender expertise in the water sector is small, few gender experts in Bangladesh have knowledge about technical subjects such as WASH and agriculture, or environmental water skills. In many Government agencies certain officers have been assigned the title of Gender Focal Point, but the necessary capacity and expertise for the function often needs to be build. Additionally, monitoring of SDG 6 is only possible if everyone involved in collecting gender-disaggregated data and implements activities from a gender perspective. There is no empowerment without proper WASH and IWRM management and facilities. (2019, JM, KA)



Groupwork during coaching about inclusion