



Water priorities of women and men often differ

Limited access to water is an insuperable obstacle to escaping poverty. Rural women spend hours each day fetching water. In towns, the poor pay more for water than the better off with piped supplies.

The Asian Development Bank estimates that one in three Asians does not have access to a safe drinking water source within 200 meters of home, and one in two Asians lacks adequate sanitation.

Research and experience from the Gender and Water Alliance (GWA) demonstrate that when women and men are involved in making decisions on how to share, supply and protect water, it can be used efficiently and fairly.

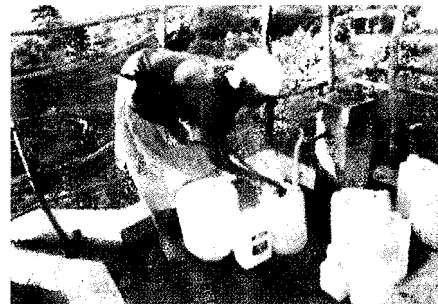
In Ecuador, women lead the Indian community efforts to strengthen canals and water rights in the Andean region. Inés Chapi, elected as an irrigation board member in Licto near Riobamba, manages the irrigation system and trains local people to irrigate. She is also fighting to defend the water rights from encroachment and from takeover by commercial interests. (Source Bulletin No. 36)

Research showed that women in Cambodia, Indonesia and Vietnam put a greater value than men on household toilets. The Water and Sanitation Program suggested that women should be treated as 'valued customers' and given a greater voice in how and where toilets are planned and installed. It also showed that the extra work to keep toilets clean falls on women in the family. (Source Bulletin No. 27)

Gender issues are clearly a vital factor in encouraging development, economic activity and girls to remain in school. However, a 'gender dimension' often just means meetings for women, peripheral to the real planning process.

This woman from the Sironko District of Uganda is a multi-tasking manager with daily performance targets. She wakes early to fetch water, store it, distribute it and manage sanitation facilities in the home. She goes to bed long after dark, when the cooking, cleaning, laundering and other chores are done. She is probably also responsible for domestic animals. The 21st century woman participates in community development, and uses 'spare' time for income generating. She lives a high-pressure executive lifestyle, lacking only income, status, holidays, help in the home, lifestyle consultant, retirement date and pension. Will the action decade - Water for Life - make a real difference to her life?

Picture from Allen Wekoye, Uganda.



Even in South Africa, where 50% of the membership of decision-making committees must be women, Barbara Schreiner, Deputy Director-General at DWAF, says: "It is easier to write good policy than to turn it into reality." A Water Research Commission report of a study in four villages near the town of Peddie reported: "The project was all about providing water, and the gender aspect was just an afterthought." (<http://www.irc.nl/page/8393>)

As Ronnie Kasrils, former Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry, South Africa, put it: "Poor people are saying that they need water not only for drinking, cooking and washing, but also for productive purposes. We must hear the desire of poor households to lift themselves up out of poverty, and the role that water can play in this process". (Responding to poverty IRC <http://www.irc.nl/page/8039>)