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Nana Ama Serwah Poku Sam

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Gender Mainstreaming and Integration of Women in Decision-Making: The Case of Water Management in Samari-Nkwanta, Ghana

Nana Ama Serwah Poku Sam

Problem Statement

Community participation and management of water and sanitation projects in which the beneficiaries have responsibility, authority and control over the development of such services are now recognized as being essential to their success (Ribot, 2002; Pretty and Ward, 2001; Gross et al, 2000; Narayan, 1995; McCommon et al., 1990). Women's participation is particularly critical.

In Ghana, traditionally, women with the help of their children are the primary collectors, users, and managers of water in the household. When water systems break down they are likely the most affected since they then have to travel far to search for water for household use (Wijk-Sijbesma, 1998). They may also be the key players in implementing changes in hygiene behavior. Despite the knowledge and experience that rural women bring to the management and preservation of water resources, their contribution and roles are often overlooked or underutilized in the drafting of water and sanitation policies since men have the greater role in public decision-making.

In Ghana there is still a gap between men and women as both agents of change and beneficiaries in the water and sanitation sector. The focus of this research, therefore, is to assess how the conscious consideration of gender issues has affected the outcomes of the Samari-Nkwanta Water Supply and Sanitation Project (SWSSP) in the Southwestern part of Ghana. The outcome of the study revealed that the involvement of women and men from the initial stages of project to the end helps to enhance more equitable participation and responsibility sharing.

Research Methodology

The community in which this project took place is Samari-Nkwanta, with about 650 inhabitants and situated about 373 km (232 miles) from Ghana's capital, Accra. It is located in the Ejura-Sekyedumasi District, which represents about 7 per cent of the Ashanti Region, and is home to a World Vision Ghana (WVG) Area Development Programme (WVG, 2004). The community is in a rural area where farming is the main source of livelihood and engages 60 per cent of the economically active population.

Primary data were collected through appreciative inquiry style interviews with key community stakeholders. The main instruments used were focus group discussions, one-on-one interviews (both semi-structured and open-ended) and document analysis from a gender perspective. Working with community facilitators, the researcher selected a cross-section of community members to interview, using a random quota sampling procedure. Her use of sex-disaggregated indicators and the gender analysis process generated data to compare the ‘before’ and ‘after’ scenario in the community and to develop a gender activity profile.

Secondary data sources included the project’s strategic plans, monitoring and evaluation reports, annual reports, World Vision Ghana (WVG)’s human resource policy documents and the community’s training manuals.

Six focus group discussions and 50 individual interviews and direct observations were used to carry out the survey. The individuals included 1) Water and sanitation (WATSAN) committee members; 2) Pump maintenance volunteers (PMVs) 3) Artisans for construction of latrines; 3) Teachers; 4) Youth (18-24 years); and 5) Other community members (both men and women).

Background Information

Before the water project, women in Samari-Nkwanta worked a daily average of 19 hours, while men worked around 12 hours a day. During the dry season when the community’s regular water sources dried up, women and girls had to walk about three to four miles over dangerous terrain to bring water and firewood to their families, sometimes more than once a day. Their primary water source area was described as “Aberewa nnko”, meaning old women cannot get there. One Samari resident, Zenabu Yakubu, a young energetic Busanga woman, said, “She made one or two trips a day and was ready for a fight if anybody used the water lavishly (WVG, 2000). ”Many girls had to abandon their schooling to search for water. As a result the community members from this area attributed the guinea worm infestation as a punishment and curse from their ancestors as a result of their disloyalty to their gods.

Generally community’s water and sanitation programmes came about in response to the need for interventions to address a serious infestation of guinea worm, which had existed among the community members for several decades. . In Ghana, guinea worm is prevalent mostly in remote areas where there are few wells and where people draw their drinking water from ponds and water holes. The worm causes extreme pain and sometimes permanent disability. This problem, combined with poor access to potable drinking water in the region, led to the birth of the SWSP in 1992 (WVG, 2003).

In response to a severe drought in Ghana in 1982-1983, WVG commissioned the Ghana Water and Sewerage Corporation (renamed the Ghana Water Company in 1993) and the Ghana Water Resource and Research Institute to conduct a survey on water supply in communities where WVG operated. The 1984 survey report revealed that lack of potable water was a great constraint to WVG's rural development programmes. In response, the organization developed the Ghana Rural Water Project (GRWP). Since then, the GRWP project has shifted from a strictly technology-driven, "get it done" approach to a community-based, people-oriented, demand-driven focus. This included an acknowledgement that there was a significant correlation between addressing gender concerns, poverty alleviation and the well-being of children (WVG, 2000).

Through the GRWP initiative, WVG supplied the Samari-Nkwanta village with two boreholes fitted with hand pumps, two public Ventilated Improved Pit (VIP) latrines and a urinal. The community has since identified that this water and sanitation project has had a high level of community participation and gender integration and that it has brought them considerable relief in many areas of their lives.

Best practices

WVG put several measures in place to mobilize and empower both male and female community members. These included:

- Gender sensitisation and awareness of community members;
- Integrating gender issues in all aspects of the project;
- Making a conscious effort to ensure that both women and men participated in community consultations by holding separate women's and men's focus groups;
- Ensuring equal representation of women and men on the WATSAN committee;
- Promoting adoption of hygienic practices and user-based sustainable operation maintenance systems; and
- Promoting the use of decentralized and participatory approaches by community members.

The male dominance prevalent in some Moslem communities in Ghana was especially apparent in Samari-Nkwanta (Adow Auckhinleck, personal communication, 2005). The women assumed that they should not seek new roles as water facility managers and discouraged other women from doing so, as it was

perceived as a male role. However, WVG's decision to drill boreholes in a way that deliberately involved both women and men led community members to re-evaluate their existing gender roles. This was reinforced by the WVG ensuring that women and men were represented equally on the WATSAN committee. The women were also given equal access to training in water systems operations and maintenance and environmental sanitation methods.

The community consultations led to a realization that there was also an urgent need to construct laundry facilities close to the boreholes to meet women's needs. Culturally, washing is done at the water source and this had led to a polluted water site. It was decided, therefore, to build specially constructed laundry pads close to the borehole sites to facilitate clothes washing and improved sanitation.

In the project's planning stages, the women's focus group brainstorming sessions also identified a critical need for toilet facilities and urinals. The lack of accessible toilets meant that during the rainy season the women found it difficult to go out and defecate – unlike the men, who were able to utilize a more “free-range” toilet system (Joshua Wetty, Personal communication, 2005). Therefore women were more motivated to develop improved sanitation to give them more convenience and privacy. The women also indicated that they would be the ones keeping the facilities clean as they considered it to be women's responsibility to maintain community sanitation facilities.

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The GRWP helped transform human lives and many communities through projects start up and review workshops in three principal phases: preparatory phase, implementation phase, and management for sustainability (Auckhinleck and Oppong 1998).

1) Preparatory phase: The entry into the Samari community was facilitated through collaboration with traditional leaders, community leaders and existing community development committees. A follow-up was awareness creation promoted through community meetings, baseline data collection and several project start-up workshops. The ultimate result was community acceptance and willingness to participate. Thus communities were encouraged to participate actively in project planning to ensure that the beneficiary communities acquired enough skills to continue with the program when WVG activities ended.

2) Implementation Phase: This phase engaged collaboration, an inter-sectoral and multidisciplinary approaches, institutional development and local human capacity building. WVG organized workshops and gained support from various key actors in the government, district assemblies and various management committees (WATSAN) to stimulate synergies and some kind of accreditation. In the long run this consensus-building tool helps encourage and promote empowerment of community members.

3) Management for Sustainability phase: WVG operated by exploring the services of “para-professionals”. They trained these professionals who generally have lived in the community/district for a significant amount of years, had a good knowledge of the rural community and also are well accepted by the community members. As part of the local training received by the para- professionals, they become mediators in starting up self-sustaining projects. The emphasis in these strategies was to prepare communities to understand and accept the projects, to regard the water supply systems as their own, and to train local volunteers in the repair and maintenance of the water facilities. The recognition of opinion leaders and existing local institutions in the Samari-Nkwanta community from the early start of project guaranteed ownership, maintenance and sustainability of the facilities installed.

Analysis of Results

1) Promotion of gender equality

The WVG’s conscious integration of gender issues in the SWS Project and their use of a participatory approach has 1) shifted male-dominance to a more equitable sharing of power; 2) increased women’s leadership, particularly within the WATSAN committee where both women and men were encouraged to choose their own representatives to allow for transparency and ease of contact; 3) increased women’s voice and consideration of their needs and priorities; 4) increased input from both men and women on decisions connected with site locations for the new boreholes and 5) increased women’s empowerment with regard to decision making processes within the WATSAN Committee, the PMV, and general community.

A seven member WATSAN committee is comprised of three females and four males. User groups noted that WATSAN committee leadership was open to both sexes. Women selected for positions for which they had limited or no experience, such as treasurers, were trained by WVG in the skills needed to facilitate their new roles. They also received in-service training as caretakers, pump maintenance technicians and latrine construction artisans. They did report however, that the training was inadequate to meet the challenges encountered. Nevertheless, five out of the eight

members of the male focus group were of the opinion that the idea of empowering women through the WATSAN committee was a very effective measure.

2) Other Benefits of the Water and Sanitation project

a) Gender time profile and roles

Community members experienced the following changes in their quality of life as a result of their participation in the project:

- Increase of five hours per day in time available to women, which they are using to work on their farms, care for their households and engage in other productive activities;
- Development of more sustainable livelihoods as extra time enables women to take advantage of income-generating opportunities such as grass-cutter (a local game animal) domestication, beekeeping, cashew farming and other micro-enterprises; and
- Increase in the number of men helping women with water collection, since the new borehole is close to their homesteads and the women need to go to the market to sell the products from their new income generating activities.

b) Health and hygiene

Project education measures and ready access to a clean source of water have led to the:

- Eradication of guinea worm among the entire water user group;
- Increased awareness and acceptance that guinea worm eradication is directly related to hygiene practices as opposed to supernatural forces;
- Adoption of changes in personal hygiene practices by community members;
- Adoption of diverse ways of obtaining clean drinking water by community members, such as sieving, boiling and allowing the water to cool down before drinking; and
- Sanitary inspectors being invited by community to conduct weekly inspections.

c) Education

The Samari Water and Sanitation Project also led to the founding of a primary school in the village in 1993. Consequently there has been:

- **A dramatic increase in girls' school attendance: in 2004 there were 105 girls out of a total 201 students in the primary school (53 per cent of the total),**

- whereas in 1995 girls accounted for 23 of 54 students in primary school (43 per cent of the total).
- An increase in full-day school attendance, with 82 per cent of the teachers noting that students who used to come to school at 11 a.m. were now coming as early as 8 a.m.; and
 - An increase in the number of primary students who plan on continuing their education to the senior secondary school level: data from the junior secondary school indicate that 10 boys and 13 girls out of 42 pupils have indicated their intention to continue.

Access to water

Increased community access to a reliable year-round water supply has also led to:

- Strong community participation in the water user groups with substantial voluntary financial participation across the user groups to ensure proper borehole maintenance (most respondents attributed their willingness to pay to the fact that they were now able to participate in income generating activities);
- Improved farming practices due to reliable access to water;
- Increased safety for women and girls; and
- Increased privacy for defecation and personal hygiene for women and girls.

Life stories

Amina Mohammed suffered from snakebite in 1990 during her search for water at night.

“It was cold, dark and late in the night, but I could not sleep because I did not have a drop of water for use. Haunted by these circumstances, three friends and I set off with lanterns to search for water in the dry riverbed where there were holes dug in it to collect water. Less than a kilometre from home I felt a sharp bite on my foot. I shouted ‘*mawuo*’ (translates to “am dead” in native twi language) and lowered my lantern immediately. I sighted a snake, which quickly vanished into the bush and I saw a stain of blood on the spot. My heart jumped and fear gripped me. ‘*Mawuo*,’ I shouted again. My friends rushed me back home on their shoulders. The whole village was awake. The medicine men acted swiftly and I was given concoctions to drink. They made a series of cuts on the skin at my feet and applied herbs. I vomited the whole night and recovered at a slow pace. I thank God I am alive to tell this story and enjoy the borehole water which is available the whole year and stands only 100 yards from my home.”

Madam Margaret Konado, a 60-year-old widow with seven children, had this story to tell.

“About 14 years ago water was really a serious problem here. I must confess that I used to bathe my seven children in the same basin and with the same water in turns once a week. The water I fetched from the water source was very dirty. The children developed skin rashes. Due to the sweaty nature of our skin, we were almost always attacked by bees, especially at the water points. The children had swollen faces for days before they were cured with herbal medications. The lack of potable water made us suffer from guinea worm. I could not go to the farm due to my swollen foot. You can agree with me that one felt incapacitated and could not engage in any form of activity. The dirty water also gave some discoloration to the food. It made us sick all the time. Now with the availability of potable water we bathe, wash our clothes regularly and my children are looking healthier. We no longer suffer from guinea worm.”

Policy Recommendations

Water supply and sanitation projects have impacts on people’s lives that expand far beyond the immediate benefits gained. For example, improvements in health and reductions in time devoted to water collection can highlight the work, efforts and skills women could put into management and use of water resources. Improved access to water and sanitation facilities necessitates considering equitable gender allocation to these resources. For instance formulated policies need to consider gender perspectives of all end users.

The experience of the Samari water supply and sanitation project provides lessons for policy makers, key players and implementing agencies. These experiences with gender mainstreaming can be used to generate guidelines and principles for developing an appropriate policy institutional framework. The study shows that the following policy recommendations are useful for promoting replications and adaptation in other similar contexts.

1) Local level

a) Capacity building

World Vision Ghana as a lead agency in Samari-Nkwanta created forums for all collaborators to share ideas throughout the water project start-up and review workshops. Since a holistic, community-oriented process was used and involved intensive process of capacity building and community training before drilling of the borehole, the community was empowered with the skills and knowledge to make their own decisions. For example, the early stages of the project involved facilitating the community to elect some form of project steering committee (WASTAN). This approach utilized the maximum use of local labor and materials in the implementation of the SWSP.

- Time management skills are essential for women to acquire. In particular, skills they need to reallocate their time from water collection for income generation activities and other lucrative work.
- Women's time constraints differ from those of men. As such prospective project activities such as training or voluntary labor contribution need to take into account women's daily and seasonal time constraints. For example training during morning hours precludes the participation of many women
- Male community members should be encouraged to offer women the opportunities and respect to assume diverse roles in contributing to community well-being.

b) Decision -Making

Decision-making is an important function in community water user groups. To be successful, significant decision-making should take place at the grassroots levels. In Samari-Nkwanta's case, members of the WATSAN committee, primarily women, believed that their individual roles and responsibilities had not only built up their self-confidence but also empowered them to contribute effectively to decisions during meetings.

- Based on "demand driven" approach, government/donor funds should be directed to communities willing to operate and improve water and sanitation systems.
- Periodic inventory of women and men's interests and needs in participation should be carried out through participatory democratic decision making. For instance identification of real needs and interests of women with regards to their role as "domestic water managers" can help narrow down priorities in designing interventions to meet their demand
- Women must be ensured an active and significant presence in decision-making bodies included with the opinion of leaders/traditional authorities in connection with management of the water and sanitation facilities.

C) Role of Stakeholders

In the village of Samari-Nkwanta, WVG's decision to drill boreholes using a participatory approach that consciously involved both women and men led community members to re-evaluate the existing gender roles. One of the goals was to ensure that women and men were represented equally on the WATSAN committee. As a result this objective provided an enabling platform for broader stakeholder dialogue, facilitation and cooperation on water- and sanitation-related matters.

II) National Level

According to the Ghana National Water and Sanitation policy, for rural areas; "provision of potable water without adequate sanitation facilities and hygiene education will reduce the positive impact these services render to communities." World Vision, Ghana's strategies through the Ghana Rural Water Project, recognized community participation as a key provision of these services. For example WVG organized workshops and gained support from various key actors in the government, district assemblies and various management committees (WATSAN) to stimulate synergies and some kind of accreditation.

The role of different water users such as WASTAN committees and other stakeholders needs to be defined to avoid confusion in management and possibly false expectations among community members. In particular the role of traditional rulers, chairman of the WATSAN and district assemblies should be strengthened if gains already made in communities are to be maintained and advanced and problem areas corrected. For example, the water committee management of Samari-Nkwanta should officially nominate caretakers for the latrine facilities to improve cleanliness of those areas.

III) Gender-Related Programs

a) Training

The gender balance approach of the Samari-Nkwanta project in addressing water and sanitation issues took into account women as participants and contributors in the community-oriented process. For example, in our study it was perceived from the women's group that the idea of empowering women was worthwhile since they were the main beneficiaries with regards to maintaining the water and sanitation facilities.

- The national government agencies concerned with rural water management should encourage the inclusion of gender policy and training in their program of work to encourage participation at all levels
- Meetings and representatives from national organizations including; the ministries, district assemblies, women's group and key stakeholders should come together from time to time, so that they can identify common needs and/or vision among themselves and within the entire community to develop priorities.
- Diverse groups like the government, municipal, metropolitan and district assemblies among others should create synergies to design comprehensive holistic plans to facilitate community programs/projects
- Promote training programs for traditional rulers, women's groups and other implementing institutions to help enforce local laws and regulations
- For long-term functioning of rural water projects, it is necessary to improve the knowledge base and diagnostic skills of women and men to ensure maintenance of the facilities

b) Community Participation

Improved access to water and clean water and sanitation utilities in rural areas are crucial to community development. In Samari-Nkwanta, the community needs assessment session during the start of the project gave community members the chance to identify needs (e.g. toilet facilities and access to potable drinking water) that were most critical and opportunities (investing in micro-projects like cashew farming) that made agriculture more sustainable in the region.

c) Enhancing Data Information in Research

Local intermediaries such as opinion leaders, para-professionals and technical expertise are responsible for creating an appropriate environment for exchange and access of ideas and technical information.

In the study, the gender activity matrix was relevant in identifying factors such as the time allocated to different activities by women and men. Analysis generated of the activity profile creates differential opportunities or constraints for men's and women's participation and benefits from projects. For instance women and men differed in their concerns about the time allocated to activities. For example most of the men were reported to work outside the home. They were involved in income generating activities while women were reported to be both at home and at work.

- Promotion of community participation in projects like water requires creating awareness and building sensitivity at all levels of the program while at the same time recognizing and acknowledging the wealth of information available from women as primary users

- The involvement of women and men from the initial stages of the project to the end helps to enhance participation and responsibility sharing of both genders doing domestic chores as well as income-generating activities. The time allocated to different activities suggests the need to address time constraints by opening opportunities for non-traditional participation while emphasizing the value of the supporting roles of women. Realizing this potential will require developing training programs appropriate for both men and women and providing opportunities for women to gain experience in public participation and leadership.

d) Gender Mainstreaming

Differences between women's and men's views on the impact on the water project and other related matters suggest that combining the needs and interests of the whole community has the potential to address a wider range of economic, social and ecological issues that affect the water and sanitation project. For example concern expressed by women of keeping up with the maintenance of toilet facilities and the likely impact it has on the community at large, represents an opportunity for community-planning discussion to broaden the concept of gender mainstreaming to include consensus building and conflict resolution. Furthermore incorporating their concerns in the planning process will allow women's interest to be represented and could broaden the basis for sustainability of the project. A typical example in Samari Village was that, since women were involved in all stages of planning and provision of water and sanitation services functioning of these facilities were ensured.

e) Practical Applications

Actions that ensured participatory planning and strategy were paramount in the Samari Water Supply and Sanitation project.

For instance during the women's focus group discussions, a majority of them reported that ways of getting clean drinking water consisted of sieving, boiling and allowing the water to cool down before drinking. One woman noted specific efforts to maintain water quality: "The women's group together with some members of the WATSAN committee invited sanitary inspectors (village health coordinators) to come once a month to sensitize the community members about best hygienic practices."

Lessons learned

The main factors that contributed to the success of this project were:

- Gender sensitisation and mass awareness training and promotion used at the start of the project;
- Use of a participatory approach that was consciously inclusive of women;

- Active promotion of the involvement and empowerment of community members (especially of women) at all levels of decision-making related to water and hygiene practices;
- Ensuring that both men and women were equally represented on the WATSAN committee and received relevant training to support their participation;
- Ensuring that both female and male water users were responsible for the water system's maintenance and operation; and
- Fostering sensitivity to both women's and men's issues in the community.

The use of these gender mainstreaming and participatory approaches contributed significantly to:

- An increase in the recognition and visibility of women's roles, equal to that of men, in the WATSAN Committee, the pump maintenance volunteers, the latrine construction artisans and in the community in general; and
- A real sense of ownership of their water and sanitation resources by both the male and female members of the Samari community.

The community was able to achieve these results and more equitable access to clean drinking water and sanitation facilities primarily because the project was facilitated within an atmosphere of cooperation and coordination between men and women, as well as between the Ghanaian government and World Vision Ghana.

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