



Gender Community



Environment



Water & Environmental Sanitation Network (WES-Net India)

Solution Exchange for Gender Community Solution Exchange for WES-Net India Consolidated Reply

Query: Gender Equity in Participatory Irrigation Management, from DHV-MDP, New Delhi (Experiences).

Compiled by Bonani Dhar and Pankaj Kumar S., Resource Persons; additional research provided by Sarika Dhawan and Ramya Gopalan, Research Associates
28 July 2006

Original Query: M. S. Prakash, DHV-MDP Consultants, New Delhi
Posted: 3 July 2006

While working as a team leader on the World Bank funded Andhra Pradesh Economic Restructuring Project on Role of Gender (Women) in Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM), I had discussions with the Government of AP on incorporating gender concerns in policy.

In spite of willingness in government towards building policy space for gender, **the lack of a legal framework** was found to be a major concern. To fill this gap, I am helping to redraft the regulations on Water Users Association (WUA), which may provide necessary knowledge base to policy planners in Government of Andhra Pradesh.

To detail the context of the issue, in all states of India, women spend almost two thirds of their time in on-farm activities. However, they remain “voiceless” when it comes to taking decisions in sharing and management of water for irrigation. Thus, ***Gender equity in Participatory Irrigation Management*** (PIM) is a crucial issue.

Irrigation sector reforms have been a priority area among economic sector reforms in Andhra Pradesh. Although women’s empowerment concerns have been raised both in the Vision 2020 document of the state as well as the AP Water Vision, there have been no initiatives to engender irrigation sector policy and more importantly, to support women’s inclusion in WUAs. Women’s status in the WUA is restricted as only legal owners of land have voting rights and most land is under ownership of men. Additional obstacles in women’s inclusion despite the reforms are:

- **Legal**-There are no special provisions for women's participation in the Andhra Pradesh Farmers' Management of Irrigation Systems Act, 1997 (APFMIS).
- **Political**-Representation of women elected in most medium and minor systems is poor and generally reflects vested political interests.
- **Social**- So far WUA activities are focused on construction works related to system rehabilitation, participation in which is dominated by men.
- **Capacity building**-Women's participation remains very low in training programs, which has been a major barrier for women not being able to come to decision-making forums at par with men.

I therefore request members to share their experiences in the following areas on ensuring gender equity in PIM:

1. Successful examples of women's involvement in PIM, enabling them to play a key role in decision making within WUAs.
2. Suitable mechanisms for enhancing the qualitative representation of women within the WUAs in addition to focusing on increasing their numerical strength?
3. Existing or potential legal and mandatory interventions enabling women to be at par with men in decision making on water sharing and management issues?

Responses received, with thanks, from:

1. [A. B. Ota](#), B. J. B. Autonomous College, Bhubaneswar
2. [Jyotsna Bapat](#), Independent Consultant, New Delhi
3. [Shankar Narayanan](#), The World Bank, New Delhi
4. [Amitabh Mishra](#), Department of Water Resources, Government of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal
5. Bhavanishankar Benkipur, Sahayoga, Bangalore ([Response 1](#); [Response 2](#))
6. [Amitava Basu Sarkar](#), Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust, Dehradun
7. [B. L. Kaul](#), Progressive Educational Society and Society for Popularization of Science, Jammu
8. [Sumita Akhauri Sahay](#), MDP-DHV Consultants, New Delhi
9. [Bonani Dhar](#), UNIFEM, New Delhi
10. [Narsanna Koppula](#), Irrigation Department and CADA, Hyderabad
11. [Rachna Sarkar](#), Uttar Pradesh Water Sector Restructuring Project, Lucknow
12. [Advaita Marathe](#), Mahila Swaraj Abhiyan, Gujarat
13. [Shashidharan Enarth](#), Development Support Centre, Ahmedabad

Further contributions are welcome!

Summary of Responses

The query on gender equity in Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) elicited a wide range of responses from members. They emphasised that although women provide almost 70% of the labour in agriculture, they rarely get a chance to participate in decision-making. Respondents also deliberated on some of the legal, political, socio-cultural and capacity building constraints preventing women from becoming members of Water Users' Associations (WUAs), exercising their voting rights, contesting elections and being part of the Executive Committees.

As one of the main **legal factors inhibiting women's participation in PIM**, the group listed that women's lack of legal rights over land has long-term repercussions. This restricts their ability

to control resources and access credit. To correct this imbalance, members suggested that all further land purchased be joint owned by both the husband and wife. They also recommended that all future participatory irrigation acts compulsorily include women as members and ensure they have voting rights within WUAs.

Participants pointed out that PIM programmes need to facilitate women's inclusion in WUAs. Ensuring adequate number of women members within WUAs provides them the confidence to participate fully in this traditionally male dominated space. For example, members shared a project in [Kenya](#) which held a special meeting for women and ensured that in all the preparatory and committee meetings, at least half of the participants were women. This approach increased women's participation and knowledge of the project.

The issue of **representation of women in management and decision making** in WUAs occupied much of members' attention. They felt that the rules of WUAs need to be changed, allowing women to represent their husbands and vote. Members quoted a case from [Orissa](#), where men allowed their wives entry into the WUA. Additionally, governments could amend PIM Acts so women would have a legal right to participate in WUA. The [Madhya Pradesh](#) government has already modified its Farmer Management of Irrigation Systems Act, which mandates the participation of one male and one female member from every land-owning household in the command area of an irrigation system, making it possible for women to become formal members of WUAs. Members suggested that the draft Uttar Pradesh PIM Act, which touches on women's participation, could further expand its scope.

Similarly, members wrote about two projects that include women formally in WUAs. In a project from the [Philippines](#), farmers insisted on involving husband and wife teams in all WUAs. In a tank management project in [Karnataka](#) the WUA consists of all water users regardless of landholdings and reserves seats for women within the managing committee. Along with the above-mentioned mechanisms for including women, the group suggested making mandatory the appointment of women office bearers (or even chairpersons) to subcommittees and reserving seats for women on the WUA Executive Committee.

At the same time members warned that merely increasing women's representation in WUAs will be insufficient if the goal is to improve their participation. They underscored the importance of **building the capacities of women** to allow them to emerge from the shadows of male WUA members and actively participate in decision-making. For instance, the Madhya Pradesh Water Sector Restructuring Project ([MPWSRP](#)) is training women functionaries and presidents of WUAs to improve their leadership skills, better exercise their voting rights and empower them to express their views in the WUA meetings.

Members also noted that given the crucial role women play in irrigation management, it is necessary to improve their **technical competence**. Areas identified for training included new irrigation technologies and improved irrigation practices- such as maintenance, lining of canals, optimal water flow and velocity, and construction of irrigation systems. Women, as the primary water managers on farms, would greatly benefit from such training since it would enhance their understanding of water use efficiency. A project in [Gujarat](#) successfully employed this strategy, involving women in almost all aspects of irrigation management. This inclusion increased the community's overall agriculture production, enhanced women's capacity to manage irrigation systems and resources, and in addition gave the women greater confidence.

In addition, respondents highlighted that engendering the training process will improve outreach. Most programmes hold trainings away from where women live. This adversely affects the involvement of women because attending requires travelling and taking additional time away from their household responsibilities. Instead, members contended, training programmes for

women in PIM need to be as close to their homes as possible. Also, tracking gender disaggregated data on attendance and appointing women trainers could further improve the reach and impact of irrigation training programmes. Additionally, since Irrigation Department officials are vital PIM stakeholders, the group recommended gender sensitizing departmental staff.

In the overall discussion about including women in PIM, members also drew attention to **larger societal issues related to gender**, emphasising that unless changes occur in social and religious customs, mere legislative change will not achieve the desired outcome. Consequently, members suggested the following broad areas be looked in order to improve the environment for women's participation:

- Equal legal rights for women in land ownership and suitable amendments facilitating women's involvement in the Farmers Irrigation Management Acts
- Reservations for women from land owning and share cropping families in WUAs
- Radical changes in social and religious customs, such as elimination of dowry
- Create an enabling environment for women within families and government structures
- Stop sex determination tests, which often lead to female feticide

In conclusion, the discussions underlined the importance of taking a gendered view of participatory irrigation management. The group also shared examples of preliminary field level efforts at addressing this. However, as is the case with most gender issues, the solutions lie in examining the broader socio-cultural, legal and political super structure. Members emphasised the need for continued work on the root causes of gender inequity in order to transform and empower women to assume equal status.

Comparative Experiences

Orissa

Orissa Water Resources Consolidation Project (from [A. B. Ota](#), *B. J. B. Autonomous College, Bhubaneswar* and [Bonani Dhar](#), *UNIFEM, New Delhi*)

The Irrigation Department initiated a gender sensitive pilot with funding from The World Bank. The project started a women managed executive committee of WUAs. It also trained women given entry into WUAs by their husbands since they owned land in other districts and could only be a member of one WUA. In one district women constitute 67% of the WUA members and the executive committee is managed entirely by women

From [Shankar Narayanan](#), The World Bank, New Delhi

Madhya Pradesh

Amendment to Farmers Management of Irrigation Systems Act

A policy reform initiative of the Government demonstrates gender sensitivity in PIM. Through the Act WUAs membership, voting rights & ability to stand for election is not restricted to those with the legal land holding rights, the wives of landholders can also participate, ensuring gender equality and mainstreaming of decision-making by women. As of March 2006, there are over 150 women elected to the executive committee and 28 WUAs have women presidents. Read [more](#)

Building the Capacity of Women Functionaries

The MPWSRP provides support to all WUAs within the project area to enhance the participation of women in irrigation management. The project also provides capacity-building support for women

functionaries to help them perform their duties better. The trainings have resulted in more confident and effective women members and presidents of WUAs.

Karnataka

Community Based Tank Restoration and Management Project (from [Bhavanishankar Benkipur](#), Sahayoga, Bangalore)

In this project, the WUAs comprise landowners, farmers and all those who use the community water tank. Irrespective of the type of use, everyone connected with tank are members with equal voting rights for all adult men and women. Although stipulations require one-third of the managing committee's members be women, their participation in the decision-making process is meagre, since male relations often accompany them, and participate and decide on their behalf.

Gujarat

Women Help Manage Community Irrigation System (from [Advaita Marathe](#), Mahila Swaraj Abhiyah, Gujarat and [Bonani Dhar](#), UNIFEM, New Delhi)

In 1997 a PIM project was started by a village with AKRSP-I. Responding to the state government's water policy, which incorporated PIM, it launched a project promoting participatory water management, without actively including women. Later increased understanding of their role resulted in women having direct management and decision-making power. Better water management has increased production and made women more empowered. Read [more](#)

International

From [Bonani Dhar](#), UNIFEM, New Delhi

Philippines

Husband and Wife Teams in WUAs

Farmers insisted on including both men and women farmers as a husband and wife team in the WUAs, because it gave greater flexibility to both spouses and freedom to deal with other tasks. Furthermore, this ensures that the agricultural and irrigation management decision-making is joint and equity. In addition, since women control the household cash flow, their involvement in formulating irrigation policies and membership fee collection generated better output.

South Asia

Alternate Ways for Access to Irrigation Services

Research has shown that level of female participation in water users' organizations is minimal. One reason identified is that formal and informal membership criteria exclude women. Also, balance between costs & benefits of participating is often negative because complying with rules & practices involve time (costs) and social risks, whereas other, often informal ways of obtaining irrigation services may be more effective but less secure for female water users. For [details](#)

Kenya

Southwest Kano Project (from [Sumita Akhaury Sahay](#), MDP-DHV Consultants, New Delhi and from [Bonani Dhar](#), UNIFEM, New Delhi)

Provincial Irrigation Unit in Nyanza Province experimented with a gender-sensitive approach, which comprised of a special meeting for women, requiring a minimum 50% of participants to be women at the preparatory meetings and discussions with water users on gender issues of

committee elections. The measures implemented increased the number of women at meetings and their performance, knowledge, and participation on project matters. Read [more](#)

Cambodia

Gender and Access to Irrigation Facilities (from [Sarika Dhawan](#), Research Associate)

The Northwest Irrigation Sector Project and Stung Chinit Irrigation Rural Infrastructure Project tried to improve women's access to agricultural services and build the capacity of the government's gender working-group and project staff responsible for implementing the Gender Action Plan (GAP). The GAP will, once implemented, provide mechanisms for women to participate in decision-making and other community activities. Read [more](#)

Ecuador

Factors Affecting Control and Access to Water Resources (from [Ramya Gopalan](#), Research Associate)

Study focusing on water users from mestizo communities in Rio El Angel area, demonstrated how many factors influence control over and access to water resources, including land tenure, location, gender and labour relations. Although women's participation in WUAs is low and the male dominated culture impacts decision-making, some educated women do occupy positions of leadership, trying to solve informally their irrigation-related problems. See [IWMI Publications](#)

Nepal

Small Grant-Based Pilot Project (from [Sarika Dhawan](#), Research Associate)

In Panchakanya, a pilot project funded by the Gender and Development Initiatives Fund developed tests to determine how women improve contributions to irrigation management and agricultural production. Activities included selecting women leaders, creating a Women's Facilitator Group (WFG) and providing training on various relevant aspects to the WFG and WUAs members resulting in an increase in the WUA from 25% to 60% in one year Read [More](#)

Chhattis Mauja Irrigation Scheme (from [Ramya Gopalan](#), Research Associate)

This Scheme does not formally involve women farmers; however, this does not seem to negatively affect their access to irrigation services. In fact, the women succeed extremely well in getting their irrigation needs met, since they are outside the scheme's management. This allows the women to take more water than they are entitled to, as well as to contribute less maintenance, because it is difficult to enforce the rules on non-members. See [IWMI Publications](#)

Related Resources

Recommended Documentation

Madhya Pradesh Water Sector Restructuring Project (MPWSRP) (from [Shankar Narayanan](#), The World Bank, New Delhi)

http://www.mp.nic.in/WRD/EAP/MPWSRP_Contents.html

Based on Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) strategy, environmentally & socially sustainable gendered basin approach for water resource planning & management

Women's Participation in Irrigation Management Reaps Rewards in Gujarat from [Advaita Marathe](#), Mahila Swaraj Abhiyah, Gujarat and [Bonani Dhar](#), UNIFEM, New Delhi)

By Advaita Marathe; InfoChange News and Features; July 2003

<http://www.infochangeindia.org/features118.jsp>

Articles examines the success of Gujarat's policy on PIM with instances of women's involvement in Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP-I), based on a recent study

Gender and Irrigation in India-The Women's Irrigation Group of Jambar, South Gujarat (Working Paper 10) (from [Ramya Gopalan](#), Research Associate)

By Barbara van Koppen, Rashmi K. Nagar and Shilpa Vasavada; Aga Khan Rural Support Programme (India) and International Water Management Institute (IWMI); 2001

<http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/pubs/working/WOR10.pdf> (Size: 339 KB)

Highlights experience is Jambar showing often-untapped potential for gender-balanced irrigation intervention where women share in farm activities and decision-making.

From [Bonani Dhar](#), UNIFEM, New Delhi

Gendered Participation in Water Management: Issues and Illustrations from WUAs in South Asia

By Ruth Meinzen-Dick and Margreet Zwarteveen; Agriculture and Human Values, Vol. 15, No. 4; Springer, The Netherlands; December 1998 (paid publication). Click [here](#) to read Abstract

Reviews evidence from South Asia showing that female participation in WUAs is minimal, identifying causal factors and possible recommendations to ensure greater participation

Towards Gender Balance in Irrigation Management Experiences in Kenya South West Kano Project

By Joitske Hulsebosch and Doris Ombara; Irrigation and Drainage Systems, Vol. 9, No. 1; Springer, The Netherlands; February 1995 (paid publication). Click [here](#) to read Abstract

Details experimentation of a gender-sensitive approach by The Provincial Irrigation Unit, Nyanza during preparatory phase of their assistance to schemes

From [Sarika Dhawan](#), Research Associate

Women Improve Irrigation Flows

By Ava Shrestha and Sonomi Tanaka; Asian Development Bank; 2006

http://www.adb.org/Documents/Periodicals/ADB_Review/2002/vol34_6/women_irrigation.asp

Mentions about the success of pilot project in Panchakanya, Nepal where women's membership in WUA's has risen from 25% to 60% in one year

Linking Women to the Main Canal: Gender and Irrigation Management (Gatekeeper Series No. 54)

By Margareet Zwarteveen; International Institute for Environment and Development, Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Livelihoods Programme

<http://www.poptel.org.uk/iied/docs/gatekeep/GK54.pdf> (Size: 55.4 KB)

The paper identifies the intersection of irrigation management and gender approach-addressing women's access to water, land and decision-making

PIM, Poverty and Gender

By Barbara van Koppen; International Network on Participatory Irrigation Management; July 2004

<http://www.inpim.org/leftlinks/Newsletters/N5/n5a6/view>

Article discusses democratic Participatory Irrigation Management by including poor men and women from the very first planning phases, addressing poverty and gender concerns

Gender and Irrigation Training

Asian Development Bank (ADB); December 2005

<http://www.adb.org/Documents/Events/2005/gender-irrigation/>

Undertaken by Cambodia's Ministry of Water Resources and Meteorology in cooperation with ADB as a strategy to improve women's access to agricultural services and capital

From [Ramya Gopalan](#), Research Associate

Gender Mainstreaming in District and Village Planning Process-A Case Study of Andhra Pradesh

UN Inter-Agency Working Group on Decentralization

[Click here](#) to view document (Size: 443 KB)

Reviews and provides an understanding of gender mainstreaming in district and village process, including status of WUA's

Women and Water: Paddling Hard Against the Flow

By Sudhirendar Sharma; India Together; November 2005

<http://www.indiatogether.org/2005/nov/rvw-upstream.htm>

Reviews the book [Flowing Upstream](#), a collection of essays drawing attention to the role of women distinguishing between women as mere labor participants vs. decision makers

Mainstreaming Gender Equity in Water Management: Policy and Practice – Abstract by Dr. Sara Ahmed

National Seminar on Water, Centre for Economic and Social Studies (CESS), Hyderabad; July 2003

<http://www.cess.ac.in/cesshome/wp/VUMURHJ1.pdf> (Size: 76 KB)

A critical overview of global discourse on women's /gender roles and also looks at essential 'ingredients' for a sustainable and gender just approach to water management

Participatory Irrigation Management

By J. Raymond Peter; International Network for Water and Ecosystem in Paddy Fields (INWEPF); 2004

<http://www.maff.go.jp/inwepf/documents/inaugural/inpim-note.pdf> (Size: 102 KB)

Brief overview of different types of institutional arrangements of water user associations, suggesting a realignment of incentives for promoting effective PIM

Flowing Upstream: Empowering Women through Water Management Initiatives in India

By Dr. Sara Ahmed; Foundation Books Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi; 2005 (paid publication)

Reiterates through case studies from Gujarat, Maharashtra & Jharkhand, that mere labor participation of women not enough rather gender mainstreaming in water management

Recommended Organizations

Gender and Water Alliance (GWA), The Netherlands (from Bhawna Vajpai, * Consultant, New Delhi)

<http://www.genderandwater.org/>

A network of organizations with a vision to achieve effective policies and practice gender mainstreaming in Integrated Water Resources Management

*Offline Contribution

International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), Italy (from [Sarika Dhawan](#), Research Associate)

<http://www.ifad.org/gender/learning/sector/infrastructure/12.htm>

The Fund conducted a thematic review study for gender issues and strategies, of irrigation water user associations under IFAD-supported projects in all regions.

Recommended Website

International Water Management Institute (IWMI) - Poverty, Gender and Water (from Ramya Gopalan, Research Associate)

<http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/respages/PGW/iwmipub.htm>

Contains a list of publications pertaining to gender and water management specific to irrigation, selectively provides abstracts and allows downloads of some articles & reports

Responses in Full

A. B. Ota, B. J. B. Autonomous College, Bhubaneswar

The issue of women's participation in participatory irrigation management is interesting. Women's entry into the WUA's decision making role is debatable and has raised many policy makers' concern as well. I have carried out a study of a women managed WUA in Orissa and would like to share the experience with the members.

I would like to quote the example of Aunli, in Orissa, where on the gender sensitive efforts of the irrigation Department, the women managed Executive Committee of the Water Users Association was initiated. This happened on the pilot project within the World Bank Funded Orissa Water Resources Consolidation project.

The women were allowed entry by their husbands, as they had land in other blocks of the Districts and as per the policy one farmer had only one voting right and could be a member of one WUA only. Hence, the, farmers, who were unable to participate in two WUAs, allowed their wives to be trained to participate in the administrative activities of the WUAs. The women's literacy level in the executive committee had been to the school level and all of them were willing to learn the administrative matters and the construction related aspects etc.

The WUA in Aunli had many women members and had an all women executive committee, which functioned well.

This was interesting, and more interestingly was not replicated elsewhere. However, drawing from the example, we learnt that, the women are capable of handling the issue of water sharing and management, once they are trained, but since their entry is restricted to holding legal ownership to the farm land, they find no place. This is one good practice of participation of women in PIM and can be replicated elsewhere. However, to make the effort sustainable, I suggest the following:

1. All new purchase of land should be carried out in the joint ownership of both husband and wife, so that the women have a strong reason for entry and is not ad hoc;
2. The women should be allowed to proxy their husbands on the day of meeting and even voting, if the men are not around, the women should be allowed to vote and they should be allowed to attend the meeting of the WUAs. However, one piece of land will have one voter, either the husband or the wife;
3. Women from farm families should be trained in water application and management by the Water and Land Management Institute.

I hope this will help the policy makers to engender the PIM.

Jyotsna Bapat, Independent Consultant, New Delhi

There is a need to look at the practical realities of agricultural land holdings in India even before we talk of irrigation management and participation of women in decision-making.

In rural India, it is very difficult for women to get a clear title to the agricultural land and if she does to effectively implement cropping and take decisions related to marketing of the product. If ever a woman is a land owner it is usually by default as head of a single woman headed household because her husband and father-in-law is dead and her male children are too young to get the title.

So with this very little effective control over the asset what use will women's participation in irrigation management? Without a serious thought to this question the fate of this good intention will be like many other participatory positions reserved for women. It will be a token one effectively managed by her male relative be it her husband, brother or father/ uncle etc.

What has worked is a model proposed as women's Panchayat in Maharashtra. It is in the political sphere related to access to resources. But it is too early to say if it is effective in empowering women at a practical level. We just need to wait and watch.

Hence, my suggestions are:

- 1) The irrigation department to be gender sensitized;
- 2) At least one woman from each of the land owning families should come together and form a group. This group needs to be trained in water management and sharing. A representative from this group could be sent to the Executive Committee of the Water Users Association. This would be a sustainable approach as women will be trained and be more confident. Moreover, the woman representative will have adequate support from the larger group.
- 3) This is for those women who do not have legal access to land either jointly with their husbands or individually. (The women with legal access should be in any case be able to get the voting rights).

The policies should evolve based on ground realities if they are to be implemented.

Shankar Narayanan, The World Bank, New Delhi

As has been pointed out in the query, the criterion of land ownership as the basis of membership of Water User Associations (WUA's) has been the biggest hurdle in formally involving women in irrigation management as land is most often held only in the man's name. The Government of Madhya Pradesh has, over a year ago, amended the Madhya Pradesh Farmer Management of Irrigation Systems Act to require "participation of one male and one female member from every household that has land within the command area of an irrigation system". With this amendment, it has now become possible for women to formally become members (with voting rights) of WUAs and in the recently completed elections in March 2006, there are over 150 women members (out of a total of nearly 14500 TC members!!) formally elected as Territorial Constituency (executive committee) members and 28 WUAs (out of a total of nearly 1600 WUAs!!) have elected women presidents all of whom have been chosen in preference to several male candidates in each case. Though, at less than 2%, this is a very small beginning, in my view it is a beginning on a firm footing all the same that needs to be effectively followed up.

As part of the Madhya Pradesh Water Sector Restructuring Project (MPWSRP), in addition to providing support to all WUAs to enhance participation of women members on issues of irrigation

management, the project unit is now focusing on providing appropriate support to WUAs with women functionaries as executive committee (TC) members and Presidents in helping them perform their functions effectively.

The essential sequence from this experience in Madhya Pradesh seems to be:

- 1) Enable legal amendments to include women as members (with voting rights) of WUAs.
- 2) Provide all possible support for enhancing active participation of women members in irrigation management.
- 3) With such support, elections are likely to result in more women member getting elected in executive committee and President positions.
- 4) Provide support to formally elected women functionaries to effectively perform their role in irrigation management.

Would look forward to hearing about other experiences.

Amitabh Mishra, Department of Water Resources, Government of Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal

The question of gender equity in PIM is a very important and poses challenges before the PIM implementing agencies.

First of all when we call a Farmers' Organization, the image of a man appears in our mind. Here concept of farmer is male dominated. Instead of farmer we should call it Farm family. In most of the state where PIM Act is enacted the voting rights is only with the valid landholders who are mostly males. I would like to share the experiences of the Madhya Pradesh Government interventions and policy reforms initiatives in PIM.

In Madhya Pradesh a very progressive step is taken in this regard. The amendment in the Madhya Pradesh Farmers Management of Irrigation Systems Act, demonstrate gender sensitivity. The entry to the Water Users Association as a member is not just restricted to legal rights to the land holding, as the wives of the landholders are allowed to participate. This is to initiate:

- (a) Gender equality in the WUAs membership;
- (b) To enable women to participate in the decision making roles;
- (c) To mainstream women in the male dominated WUAs.

The provision is made the WUA members with voting rights are the valid land holders and the wife/wives of the landholders are also given the voting rights. Now the wives of the valid landholders can not only vote but they can contest in the elections. With this provision presently in the election of Water Users Associations in MP in Feb.'06, out of 1648 WUAs presidents 28 women presidents are elected and the elected Territorial Constituency (TC) members are more than 200 in numbers. Although this is not a big number but as compared to the last election (April 2000) when only 3 women presidents were elected, the participation of women is clearly seen. In my opinion this can be one of the solutions by making amendment in the PIM Act and giving voting rights to the wives of the valid landholders. Also in the sub-committees of the WUAs it should be made mandatory to appoint women in the subcommittee as the post bearer or even some of the subcommittees should be chaired by the women.

The example of MP demonstrates that women's entry to the male dominated WUAs is possible and can be replicated.

Bhavanishankar Benkipur, Sahayoga, Bangalore (response 1)

I share the views of Mr. Ota, quoting the example of Aunli. It is possible to empower women in the management of irrigation through Water Users Associations (WUAs) at the level of minor irrigation systems and at the chak level in major and medium irrigation systems. However Aunli is a unique case and there has been no replication even in other parts of Orissa. Elsewhere where women are represented through memberships in WUAs as a requirement in donor assisted projects, the women members do not speak or actively participate in the decision making processes. It is usually through their male relatives such as husbands, fathers or brothers who actually speak or take decisions on their behalf. "The women representatives or just Mukhautas."

I think literacy, empowerment through social reforms to change the family norms which are nominated by male dominated society though ages is essential, if women can effectively participate and contribute in the decision making process in participatory irrigation management. Mere training alone will not do. Changing the social status in family and in community is essential. Any type of water policy papers or enactment of laws from above cannot be effective unless there is a bottom up radical change in the societal and family outlook through internal reforms.

I would therefore like to suggest the following:

- 1) Women to be trained through the land and water management institute to enable them to understand the water planning exercise, the water sharing and management;
- 2) Social orientation be given to the families for changing the mindset;
- 3) The women from farm families to be brought forward to participate. This would require policy change from legal land owners to one woman from each legal land owner farmer family in addition to the landholding farmer.

[Bhavanishankar Benkipur](#), Sahayoga, Bangalore (response 2)

In Karnataka Community based tank restoration and management project funded by the World Bank, the WUAs do not comprise only the land owners and farmers but all those who use the water of the tank for whatever purpose. As such all those in the village who are connected with the tank water irrespective of the type of use whether farming, irrigation or for cottage industry or domestic use or even recreation are members with equal voting rights for men and women both of adult age. There are stipulations that one third of the members of the managing committee should be represented by women. Even then their participation is in decision making process. It is the male relations who accompany the women members participate and decide on their behalf. Same is the case in village Panchayats and committees even though in some, the President is a woman.

The root cause is the disempowerment of the female from the womb to the tomb within the family and in the prevailing social customs all over the country. The religious rituals are another stumbling block to allow the females to come forward. The recent case of the Sabbatical temple deity episode wherein a Kannada Actress happened to touch the deity by accident some twenty years back has raised a storm and the temple authorities are threatening to go to the court to see that the actress is punished for polluting the temple by entering and touching the feet of the deity. There is so much furore in the press about the episode. Even after making written apology the self appointed agents of the god are not satisfied and want to punish her. Likewise in most of the religious institutions women are not treated equal and in many are debarred even to Participation in the religious functions.

Unless these social and religious customs are radically changed, any amount of governmental

legislations or governmental measures will not help the lot of women and more so in the participatory irrigation process where women are used for labour work but not in the decision making process. We have to work from the roots of social and religious structures prevailing in the country for transformation and empowerment of women on equal footing. Female feticide and sex determination before birth should stop. Hindu marriage rituals and customs should change drastically to bring both the bride and bridegroom parties on equal footing. Dowry menace should be erased. All women should unite to assert rights for religious equality with men as well as in property rights. Wives should have joint ownership with husbands on property ownership. Then the findings will change markedly.

Amitava Basu Sarkar, Himalayan Institute Hospital Trust, Dehradun

Personally, I would like to look at the aspect from a different point of view. Everyone knows that state interventions in the form of acts and statutes are merely meant to lend legal support and not an empowerment tool in itself. The mandatory reservation of a few seats for the women in all such decision making bodies are not actually going to achieve "Gender Equity". Women, in general, must be empowered at the grass root level, which can be achieved by the organizations working at that level. History testifies to the fact that social change has always occurred under duress ably aided by honest leadership. Need and willingness are the most rudimentary ingredients in transforming a person/community. I perceive that both these facets are present there in to days rural women but they can not/are not allowed to decide, due to a host of other extraneous factors - most glaring of these being their very low social status, mostly almost subservient. This needs to change and can be achieved through imparting education and ensuring livelihood opportunities at the local level for the womenfolk. The world has changed a lot. The moment they are earning money they will be allowed more social space. It is a very complex problem and there can be no sweeping solution. It has to be case, locale, and community specific. Yet being the ever optimistic one, I feel sincere effort in awareness generation, imparting basic education, providing livelihood options can go a long way to sort this problem. We have to make the womenfolk ready to graduate to the next phase by making them confident, economically, cerebrally independent until then merely increasing their numerical participation and making it mandatory that will not be of any help.

The need of the day is to instil in the women leadership to ensure that women participate in decision making roles. Their participation in Water users Associations is one of them. While land rights are crucial barriers to their entry, the women who have land rights should be able to make full use of it in; (a) exercising their voting rights and; (b) expressing their point of view in the WUA meetings.

The second most important point is training of women in irrigation management. These trainings do happen in Water and land Management Institutes far away from the place of their stay, which is also an impediment in women attending them. Hence, they remain ignorant. A gender Audit of training programs would reveal the number of women attended and the efforts made to reach out to them. Hence, the training strategic plan has to be gender sensitive as well.

B. L. Kaul, Progressive Educational Society and Society for Popularization of Science, Jammu

I can not but agree with Shri Bhavanishankar's views regarding gender bias in our country. In the social set up females are talked about as Devis and young girls are worshiped as Kanyas. Some people even name their daughters after goddesses adding the word Devi with their names e.g. Parvati Devi, Lakshmi Devi etc. But in real life situations females are not given their due place. A

girl child does not receive the same treatment as the male child. We need to change our mindset and treat both sexes equally right from their birth. Unless and until we do it we shall continue to behave as hypocrites as our earlier generations did and nothing will change. Education of the girl child should be given top priority and then alone the situation will change and gender biases disappear.

Coming to the point of women's participation in irrigation management, it is not perceived in proper gendered terms by the men farmers and then the irrigation department, where as the fact is that women do spend a lot of time applying irrigation water and manage the fields. The division of labour in the fields is accepted by both men and women, and invariably the more labour intensive and time consuming jobs are for women.

The point at issue is more serious than just changing the mind set of farmers and irrigation officials, the legal ownership of the land in the root cause, due to which women are unable to have voting rights.

My suggestions are:

1. All new purchase of land be registered in joint ownership of husband and wife;
2. One woman from each farm family (land owning or share cropping) should be allowed to have voting rights.
3. At least one woman should be there in each of the Executive Committee of the WUAs.

[Sumita Akhaury Sahay](#), MDP-DHV Consultants, New Delhi

I have been reading the responses to the query with interest. The issue of women's participation in irrigation management has never been given a thought to give it a gendered dimension. Participation of men had been in the decision making level in Participatory irrigation Management, and women continued to toil endlessly in the fields.

The issue is giving recognition to women as equal stakeholders in irrigation management. It is an issue of water management and calls for understanding of water velocity, the need to keep the canals clean, to ensure the desired flow and speed to reach the tail end, the complexities of construction activity in lining the canal systems and the hydraulic boundaries of water, within which the water users share water. The women often do not get an opportunity to understand these complexities as they do not receive training. It is imperative, that those who apply water in the fields must understand the steps of water use efficiency and how much water is required in root crop zones.

The gendered approach would ensure irrigation efficiency in first place and therefore women as equal partners must receive this training. The Water and Land Management Institutes should adopt the following:

1. Gendered training strategy;
2. Gender desegregated data in men and women attending the training programs;
3. Training out reach to ensure women attend the training programs. These trainings should be held nearer to their homes;
4. Women landowners must be brought in for managing executive responsibilities of the Water Users Associations;
5. Women trainers should be appointed to train women.

In one of the experiences in Kisumu District in Kenya, though women carried out majority of activities, they generally did not participate in irrigation management. The strategy adopted was:

(a) Special meeting with women who worked in the fields; (b) 50% women' participation in all other meetings ;(c) discussion of gender issues in water users committees. This changed the mind set of the men farmers. The women leaders' performance, which was equally good was noticed and increased participation of women. *See details*

The steps required to bring the change process are:

1. Gendered Policy and a political will to include women in the decision making role;
2. Gender sensitization of farmers and the irrigation department officials;
3. Gendered approach and actual implementation of the gender mainstreaming plan to be followed.

Bonani Dhar, UNIFEM, New Delhi

A gender sensitive approach to irrigation management has two dimensions:

1. The system is developed on identifying the end users and understands the needs of end users, answering some of the questions as: (a) the objectives- to bring overall development of men and women (population) in a given area; (b) an analysis of irrigation water demand and other water uses of both men and women and (c) how irrigation water is going to impact the lives of women in particular and both men and women in general

The other dimensions are of gender participation in irrigation water management needs to be logically focused to ensure that operation and management of irrigation becomes a gender balanced activity. The irrigated agricultural system needs calculated irrigation and needs careful gender analysis as both men and women work intensively to have harvests to their satisfaction. The gendered approach in; (i) systems design ; (ii) legal and administrative matters, organizational arrangements to ensure water delivery at farm gate at a time when the crop of demands. (c) An understanding of crop water requirement, systems operations, cropping pattern and delivery schedules, is essential.

On understanding the **Systems design**, it is essential to analyze who will be using the water. It is women traditionally relied on access to land and water resources. Hence, in designing the systems the women along with men farmers need to be consulted in a command area.

Legal and administrative matters are crucial to ensure women's inclusion and participation and in engendering the policy, women's right based approach is ensured. While women do not have legal access to land in most traditional households, and even if they inherit, they do not have control over the land and its products. Hence, policy reforms and land reforms need to be gender sensitive.

Systems operations: in defining the objectives of an irrigation system and its operation, the Gender in Development is one of the key objectives in bringing overall development due to increased crop productivity on account of improved irrigation. In ensuring benefits to men and women, how can women be excluded form participating in irrigation management, which ensures women to achieve strategic needs, besides achieving practical needs. [Copy and paste this link into your browser]

[http://www.springerlink.com/\(ad03f145j05xty45o0eygnep\)/app/home/contribution.asp?referrer=parent&backto=issue,6,12;journal,31,83;linkingpublicationresults,1:102841,1](http://www.springerlink.com/(ad03f145j05xty45o0eygnep)/app/home/contribution.asp?referrer=parent&backto=issue,6,12;journal,31,83;linkingpublicationresults,1:102841,1)

Some of the **example of women's participation** in World Bank Funded **Orissa** Water Resources Consolidation Project; Farmers' Organization and Turnover program (FOT). The pilot project targeted turn over of 1,50,000ha of land to Water Users Associations in four irrigation

commands and Aunli in Angul District, is one of them where women constitute 67% of the membership and the Executive Committee is managed by women alone.

In Bharuch District in **Gujarat, Aga Khan Rural Support Program (India) (AKRSP)** has demonstrated women's successful participation in Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) with women's participation. See <http://www.infochangeindia.org/features118.jsp>

In the **Philippines farmers insisted on inclusion of both men and women farmers-husband and wife team in the WUAs**. The reason that it allows flexibility to both the spouses and freedom to attend to other activities. Also in the Philippines agricultural decision making is joint and both men and women participate equally, hence, the equity in irrigation management decision making is as well. The other advantage was that most women control the cash flow within the household. Hence, if women were involved in the WUA, in formulating policies regarding irrigation and membership fees collection, the output was better. [Copy and paste this link into your browser]

[http://www.springerlink.com/\(j4ehyt45yck5si45aajtgrm\)/app/home/contribution.asp?referrer=parent&backto=issue,1,6;journal,43,71;linkingpublicationresults,1:102917,1](http://www.springerlink.com/(j4ehyt45yck5si45aajtgrm)/app/home/contribution.asp?referrer=parent&backto=issue,1,6;journal,43,71;linkingpublicationresults,1:102917,1)

In engendering Irrigation Management some of the suggestions are:

1. Women be respected for their contributions to irrigated agriculture and be given space in decision making forum, such as WUAs
2. Women should be accorded legal rights to land (Joint tenancy) and have a legitimized entry to the WUAs;
3. WUA by-laws be amended in favor of women's inclusion, enabling one of the spouse to attend either husband or wife to attend the meetings and have voting rights to WUAs;
4. Make some reservation for women farmers' entry either from land owners or from share croppers families or both to participate in the WUAs;
5. Gender sensitizes officials, and men farmers in the command areas.
6. All trainings to include women and be monitored for the number of women trained.

Narsanna Koppula, Irrigation Department & CADA, Hyderabad

It is interesting to see the discussion on women's participation in irrigation management has been taken in as an important issue. Gender mainstreaming is one of the core area in gender development and needs a policy change as well as change in mindset, both among farmers and among the irrigation officials.

I would like to share information about a document by **Shyamala, C. Vijaya, Rao C. Sithipathi (1999) - Role of Women in Participatory Irrigation Management, a Study in Andhra Pradesh.**

Institutional arrangements of water users associations and the incentives for participating in irrigation management is crucial to the success of this induced development. The farmers, both men and women, if see benefit in associating with the WUAs, will come forward and such efforts can lead to sustainable form of development.

On examining women's participation, we find that they were excluded socially, economically and on the basis of their non-accessibility to land ownership. In Madhya Pradesh the Government has made a provision for women to be joint owners of land with their male partners and this is a policy leverage for their entry.

The Government of Andhra Pradesh has been sensitive to this issue and in order to incorporate the changes, have initiated several studies on women in PIM. The deliberations are for policy advocacy and is a positive step.

Rachna Sarkar, Uttar Pradesh Water Sector Restructuring Project, Lucknow

In Uttar Pradesh, the Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) activities are at a very initial stage. We have to make a continuous effort to effectively involve women in PIM. Though, it seems very difficult. The PIM Act of Uttar Pradesh is in draft stage and is not accessible in public domain. Women's participation in PIM has been taken care of in draft PIM Act of Uttar Pradesh but certainly it has to have more scope. More over unless the women don't have legal access to resources like land the participation in decision making can not be ensured in true sense.

Their numerical strength is also very important. To ensure their effective participation they should be involved in groups rather as individual.

Their participation may be started at a very small level. They must be involved in capacity building programs where they will be exposed to new technologies and practices. Though they do almost 70% of the farm work, their major share is in labour and they rarely get chance to participate in decision making activities just because they don't have access to land.

The issue of women's land rights is crucial and can have longer term repercussions impacting their fundamental rights, human rights and impact overall dignity, household and food security in time of divorce, widowhood and when remaining unmarried. In this case, women's access to voting rights in WUA is based on their land rights, which they do not have in most cases. If they have then also their husbands take charge and exercise the right to vote in the WUA. Why should their voices be choked? The Policy changes are required to ensure that, the women have their rights restored and they are able to participate on their own rights. Legal and policy reforms is the right based approach and should be ideally induced to ensure that women are not living at the mercy of others.

Advaita Marathe, Mahila Swaraj Abhiyan, Gujarat

It is heartening to note that the issue of women's participation in Natural Resource Management (NRM) is increasingly being looked at not from the mere representation angle but from a perspective of social change. PIM was an hitherto not counted as amongst an access and control over NRM issue; Irrigation management was too technical for women to comprehend and hence they were kept out of that even in the WUAs earlier.

I had done a small study of gender aspects of PIM in the work area of Aga Khan Rural Support Program (AKRSP-I) in Gujarat three years ago. There are many instances of women's successful involvement in all aspects of PIM - running of the motor to guarding the canals, to ensuring equitable water distribution etc.

The article can be viewed here-<http://www.infochangeindia.org/features118.jsp> also brings out the mechanisms by which this was attained and the impact that such involvement has had on the community. The details can be had from the AKRSP office.

Shashidharan Enarth, Development Support Center, Ahmedabad

We have discussed the need for changing laws, rules and incentives for enhancing gendered participation in PIM. Many of us also described quite well, the current mind-set that impedes participation. There seem to be one other aspect, from a very operational point of view, missing or inadequately covered in these discussions. And that is the role played by key irrigation department (ID) officials. One may argue that PIM is all about reducing ID's role through devolution of responsibilities and powers to water users. But we also acknowledge that ID staffs, particularly those who have interface with farming communities, continue to be a serious player. Their attitude towards participation in general and women in particular can impact the quality of results. Despite their crucial role, we don't find adequate mention of building their capacity to enable and even promote participation. This will include help in understanding emerging concepts and adopt new strategies to make it work. When government officials endorse and indeed demand gender equity in PIM we know that men in the village take them more seriously. There are policy bottlenecks and since the issue of women's participation has not been pursued as one of the important issues, it has received a subdued response so far.

There is a reason why I am raising this point: We tend to target the water-users (men and women) for most of the capacity building initiatives. As the primary stakeholder, this is an important group to address. However, in the real world today, irrigation department officials continue to play an equally important role, even in the PIM mode. While their role must change or diminish over a period of time, the transition period gives them enormous influence to impact the pace and direction of change. We keep mentioning anecdotes where a sensitive ID official have made all the difference in the quality of participation. Why do we have to leave it to chance? My suggestions would be:

- 1) Ensure women's participation with gender sensitized ID staff;
- 2) Ensure that women's inclusion in PIM is a part of the PIM Act.
- 3) Make women aware of the complexities of irrigation management through training programs.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this query!

If you have further information to share on this topic, please send it to the Gender Community at se-gen@solutionexchange-un.net.in and Solution Exchange for WES-Net in India at se-wes@solutionexchange-un.net.in with the subject reading "RE: [se-gen][se-wes] Query: Gender equity in Participatory Irrigation Management, from DHV-MDP, New Delhi (Experiences). Additional Reply"

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