



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene, Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights

Monday, July 9, 2018

Goal 6 on water, sanitation and hygiene is an enabler of gender equality and sustainable development. Lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene services undermines human rights and gender equality, exacerbates poverty and prevents achievement of other goals, including health, education and nutrition. While water, sanitation and hygiene access is vital for everyone, it has gendered impacts and implications. Understanding these is essential for policy and programs that are economically, environmentally and socially sustainable and advance gender equality.

Key data

- Almost 1/3 of the world's population still lacked access to safe drinking water in 2015.
- Nearly 2.3 billion people still do not have toilets or improved latrines in 2017
- Preventable diarrhoeal diseases kill approximately 842,000 people each year, in Nigeria alone the number is 60,000.
- Only 27% of the population in least developed countries has access to soap and water for handwashing on premises.
- In low and middle income countries progress is too slow to reach SDG6 by 2030 and there are decreasing trends in at least 20 countries.
- Lack of access to water and improved sanitation facilities has gendered impacts. For example, in rural Macedonia, 90% of female students do not attend school 4 to 5 days each month due to lack of access to facilities and means for menstrual hygiene management
- In 80% of households that do not have a source of safe drinking water on site, water collection is the sole responsibility of women and girls.
- Women and girls are estimated to spend around 40 billion hours a year collecting water; the time burden is most acute for women in rural areas.
- Time spent collecting water is time away from other activities including education, remunerative work and unpaid care, and exposes women and girls to increased risks of violence.
- Lack of disaggregated data about water and sanitation is a major barrier to understanding who lacks access, the implications of this and tracking progress on reaching all women and girls in their diversity and particularly marginalised groups experiencing multiple and intersecting barriers.

Key messages

- The human right to water and sanitation is unrealised for millions of people around the world. This has multiple and disproportionate impacts on women due to their physiology, and gendered roles and responsibilities.
- The gendered impacts of restricted access to water resources and improved sanitation include school attendance, productivity, earnings and employment opportunities, privacy, safety and risk of violence, and health, including for women with disabilities.
- Data is incomplete, inadequate and cannot be fully disaggregated, limiting analysis of problems and tracking progress on reaching all women and girls in their diversity including those experiencing intersecting barriers.
- Accountability is hindered by lack of data and lack of adequate monitoring and reporting on SDG6. In most countries, accountability mechanisms have been mentioned as not effective, and are limited mostly to a limited range of indicators of targets 6.1 and 6.2.
- Large scale water infrastructure such as dams and hydropower that proceed without being informed by women's priorities are destroying ecosystem and increasing risks from disaster both up and down stream, risking women's lives and livelihoods.
- Participation and inclusion of those affected by water management decisions in decision-making processes is a pre-requisites for water management systems that are sustainable and meet the needs of women and girls.
- Inclusive water programmes and policies lead to greater economic, environmental, and social sustainability.
- Institutionalised standards for participation of civil society in general and particularly woman at international and national voluntary review processes have not been set.

- Gendered economic inequalities mean that approaches to water access have disproportionate impacts on women; cut-offs or price hikes, fixed charges regardless of water use, and value added tax may put access to safe water out of reach.
- Empowering women to access, protect and proscribe sustainable consumptive uses for clean and safe water and effective recycling of wastewater, including from leadership positions, benefits gender equality and women's rights while also improving community health.
- Climate change and frequent disaster events are exacerbating water and sanitation challenges worldwide; and unsustainable consumption and production, extractive and polluting industries and poor water management are exacerbating climate change.
- Changes in rainfall patterns related to climate change have regionally varying and potentially significant impacts on water supply.
- Small island developing States face numerous challenges with respect to freshwater resources, including pollution, the overexploitation of surface, ground and coastal waters, saline intrusion, drought and water scarcity, soil erosion, water and wastewater treatment and the lack of access to sanitation and hygiene.

Recommendations

1. Fully **recognize, respect, and enact** policies and programs centered on, the **human right to clean water and sanitation, for all women in their diversity**. Implement international human rights instruments at local, national, and regional level to enable women's effective participation in healthy water habitats.
2. **Invest in the collection of gender data** related to water, sanitation and hygiene, including individual-level data on income and expenditure, water access and use, sanitation access, time use, and multidimensional poverty, to benchmark affordability across countries, describe the time and economic burdens of women in households, including woman-headed households, and report national, regional, and global trends. Ensure transparent allocation at national level of roles and responsibilities for disaggregated data collection, monitoring and reporting on the implementation of commitments and progress on all SDG6 targets. Increase understanding and use of **diverse data collection methods** including community data generation, analysis and reporting in gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation of water, sanitation, and integrated water resources management.
4. Make concrete and measurable efforts to ensure **just and equitable access to water and sanitation for all**, with a particular focus on women and children. Use disaggregated data to report on progress towards reaching the most marginalised women, who often have no voice in the implementation of SDG6.
5. Respect guiding principles for business and human rights framework to "protect, respect and remedy" and international instruments to prevent and address the risk of adverse human rights impact linked to **emerging technologies**, i.e., aquifer storage and recovery or other industrial and extractive processes technologies with far-reaching impacts on shared waters, land and health, that impact women due to the responsibility women have with water.
6. Strengthen **gender analysis and gender mainstreaming in WASH** at national and local levels, including participatory planning processes, to enable more informed and inclusive policies and programs that recognise the needs of women and girls and their primary responsibilities for household and community water and sanitation management. Support partnerships between public providers and women's and feminist organizations as a direct mechanism for inclusive, responsive practices.
7. **Adopt a 'nothing about us without us' approach to the governance of water and sanitation**, enabling the meaningful participation of those who will be affected by decisions, **with a focus on women's leadership**, and protecting and realising rights to common water resources.
8. Ensure meaningful **multi-stakeholder participation in planning and implementation, including local communities and** often marginalized groups, such as indigenous people, women, older persons and small-scale farmers.
9. Ensure **leadership of women in executive, policy, and operational positions** related to water and sanitation through targeted programs, capacity building, parity targets and quotas.
10. Incorporate **menstrual health as part of comprehensive sexuality education** in school curricula for all girls and boys. Sensitize and increase knowledge about menstruation as a normal part of development and reduce stigma about it. Empower women to manage menstrual health education and facilitate awareness on menstrual health management with women-led efforts within communities.
11. Ensure that Member States develop **official accountability mechanisms** at national and local level that allow meaningful consultation of all stakeholders with a gender balance, on a regular basis, and mechanisms for enforcement. Resource engagement of women's and feminist organisations and networks and the necessary capacity building and knowledge sharing initiatives.
12. Use gender budgeting to ensure investments in women and girls, and enable gendered monitoring and reporting of expenditure by development partners towards the achievement of SDG6.

ⁱ For reference: See the Women's Major Group HLPF 2018 Position Paper at <https://tinyurl.com/y7bry64r>