



WASH AND GENDER

Women and Water User Groups

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Introduction

In this series of guidance notes we consider the impacts of Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) projects on women, and how gender awareness training can improve the success and sustainability of WASH projects. This tool considers women in decision making roles, particularly Water User Groups (WUGs). It will consider challenges to women's participation, actions to enable women to get involved, outcomes and benefits, and indicators.

What is a Water User Group?

Water User Groups (WUG), known under a variety of names, are committees of ordinary community members set up to manage water sources. Through cooperative management they are responsible for managing water sources so that they meet community requirements and are sustainable¹.

Traditionally WUGs are headed by men, and this can lead to difficulties with community WASH practices as women's needs are often overlooked. Examples of problems stemming from male dominated management of WASH include:

- Water source located in inappropriate locations; increasing collection times and potential risk to collectors, increasing risk of harassment and SGBV, reducing privacy.
 - *In Afghanistan the water pumps are often placed close to mosques for the convenience of male members of the community. Due to cultural and religious traditions this means that women and girls are unable to use these water pumps, and they have to travel further to make water collections².*
 - *In Liberia a town-chief requested the borehole to be placed near his compound. This means that the women of the village do not use that borehole as they are harassed by the men who sit outside the chief's house³.*
 - *In one Ethiopian case study girls are afraid to use a water supply which has been located on the village playing fields. Lots of men and boys hang around here and many girls have been molested and abused here⁴*
- Water supply is not maintained to high enough standards as it is not a priority for men so water quality and quantity are affected and the benefits are lost.

¹ IWMI (International Water Management Institute) and SIC ICWC (the Scientific Information Centre Interstate Commission for Water Coordination), 2003. *How to Establish a Water Users Association*. IWMI and SIC ICWC.

² Islamic Republic of Afghanistan: Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development, 2013. *Rural Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Implementation Manual Narrative*. Kabul, Afghanistan

³ House, S., Ferron, S., Sommer, M. & Cavill, S., 2014. *Violence, Gender & WASH: A Practitioner's Toolkit - Making water, sanitation and hygiene safer through improved programming and services*. London, UK: WaterAid/SHARE.

⁴ Women's Refugee Commission, 2012. *In Search of Safety and Solutions: Somali Refugee Adolescent Girls at Sheder and Aw Barre Camps, Ethiopia*, New York: UK: Women's Refugee Commission.

- Women’s hygiene products are not considered, and there is no disposal for sanitary materials⁵

Women and WUGs

Typically, women play a central role in community WASH activities –collecting water, promoting good hygiene practice, maintaining sanitation facilities and managing water use in the home⁶, - and as such are well-placed to contribute to WUGs, especially as they are more likely to consider important but traditionally overlooked factors.

Past WASH projects have shown that when women participate alongside men the projects have enhanced efficiency and performance: WUGs maintain facilities to a higher standard; more people use the WASH facilities; and committee management is shown to be more effective. It has also been observed that women being involved in decision-making roles within WUGs can benefit gender needs both practically, for example reduced labour and increased female power, and strategically, in terms of gender equality⁷.

The next steps will consider the challenges to women in WUGs, actions and project best practice for empowering women in WUGS, impacts and outcomes of women’s involvement, and indicators which can be useful for measuring gender factors within WUG WASH projects.



Challenges

A variety of factors can be attributed to the underrepresentation of women in WUGs. These are described in the table below.

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| Cultural Limitations | <i>Male Superiority</i> | A long set perception of men being superior in a Brazilian village meant that having women in positions of responsibility went against cultural norms ⁸ , and so they were limited in their ability to join WUGs. |
| | <i>Male Respect</i> | In South Africa women are usually not allowed to attend WUG meetings if men are present, and when they do attend the women must sit behind the men out of respect, and not speak out loud ⁹ . |
| | <i>Male Support</i> | One Brazilian village saw that women would not join the WUG if not supported by their husbands. Some who did join later left when their husbands did not show support for their position in the committee. |

⁵ Masgon, M. A. & Gensch, R., n.d. *Water, Sanitation and Gender*. [Online] Available at: <http://www.sswm.info/content/water-sanitation-and-gender>

⁶ IASC, 2006. *Gender and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene in Emergencies in IASC Gender Handbook*

⁷ Fong, M. S., Wakeman, W. & Bhushan, A., 1996. *Toolkit on Gender in Water and Sanitation*.

⁸ United Nations, 2006. *Gender, Water and Sanitation: Case Studies on Best Practices*. UN.

⁹ Mjoli, N. & Nenzhelele, R., 2009. *Assessment of Gender Equity in Water User Associations*. Water Research Commission.

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|-------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| | <i>Elder Respect</i> | In some cultures women cannot take on positions of leadership if meetings will be attended by older women of the same community as it is considered disrespectful to do so ¹⁰ . |
| | <i>Other Constraints</i> | Women cannot join WUGs because ¹¹ : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They cannot travel alone • They cannot travel at night • They cannot speak in front of men • They cannot speak in public |
| Structural Limitations | <i>WUG Membership</i> | Often membership of WUGs is only open to formal owners of land and water, excluding most women from participating ¹² |
| Lack of Knowledge | <i>Illiteracy and Schooling</i> | Amongst poorer groups, females spend less time in education than men in the same community ¹³ . They also make up more than two thirds of illiterate individuals across the world. |
| | <i>Technological Knowledge</i> | Women typically have less access to knowledge in both areas of science and technology and so often feel they cannot make decisions around technical subjects such as water management ¹⁴ . |



Meeting and discussing women's needs for WASH facilities can help WUGs to become more sustainable.

¹⁰United Nations, 2005. *Women & Water*. UN Division for the Advancement of Women.

¹¹ Howarth, S. E. et al., 2005. *Promoting Good Governance of Water Users' Associations in Nepal*. Department of Irrigation of his Majesty's Government of Nepal.

¹² Meinzen-Dick, R. & Zwarteveen, M., 1998. *Gendered Participation in Water Management: Issues and Illustrations from Water Users' Associations in South Asia*

¹³ Olinto, P., Beegle, K., Sobrado, C. & Uematsu, H., 2013. *The State of the Poor: Where are the Poor, Where is Extreme Poverty Harder to End, What is the Current Profile of the World's Poor?*.

¹⁴ UNEP, 2004. *Women and Water Management: an Integrated Approach*. UNEP, WEDO, United Nations Foundation.

Actions

In order to reduce the challenges and constraints which currently prevent women from being members of WUGs, projects should include actions which improve gender equality within communities and enhance the number of women in decision-making roles. There are several approaches which are best practice for projects with WUGs, and these are described below.

Capacity Building

Capacity building refers to the ability of both women and men to participate in WUGs and take on decision-making roles. It is important that all projects invest heavily in capacity building steps so that WUGs can become self-sustainable and have long-term impacts.

Information sharing

This information must be available to all members of communities .

Capacity building must be tailored to meet the socio-cultural needs of the community.

Training

Both men and women must be trained in monitoring and measuring skills, how to plan and implement maintenance actions and how to manage the WUG itself. Creates self-sustainable and self-managing WUGs through training in governance, financial management and monitoring.

Technical Support

Provide technical support to WUGs whilst projects are in action.

Enables water, sanitation and hygiene facilities to be correctly maintained and also will help to educate the WUG.



Richard Hanson/Tearfund

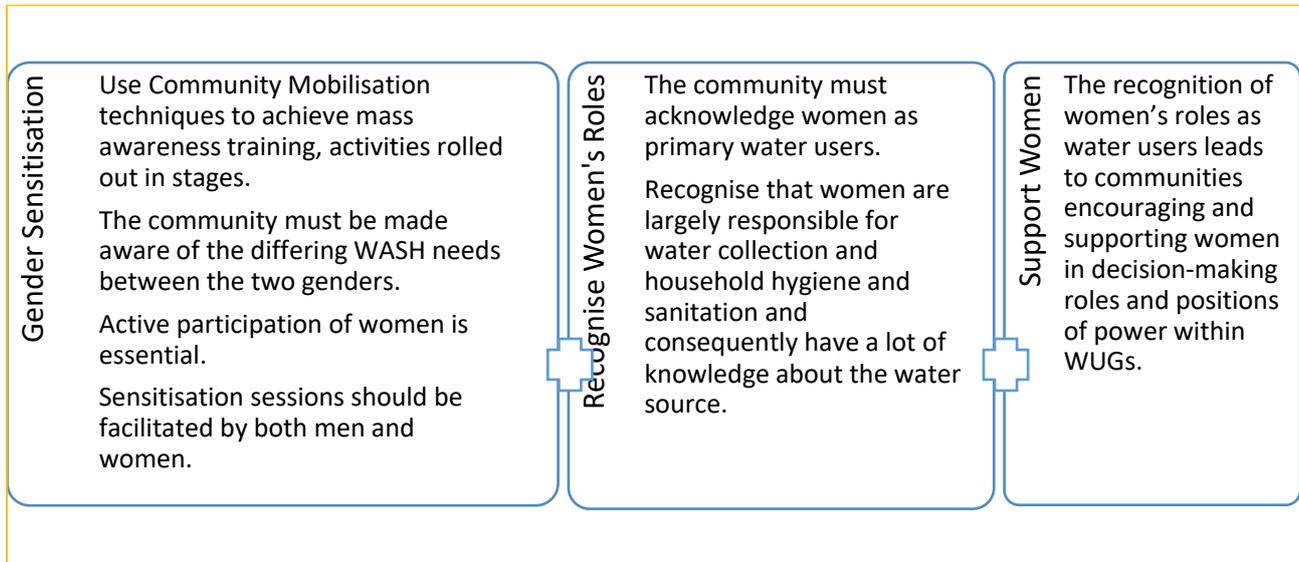


Richard Hanson/Tearfund

Women are often the primary water users at household level. Their input for siting water sources is essential to success

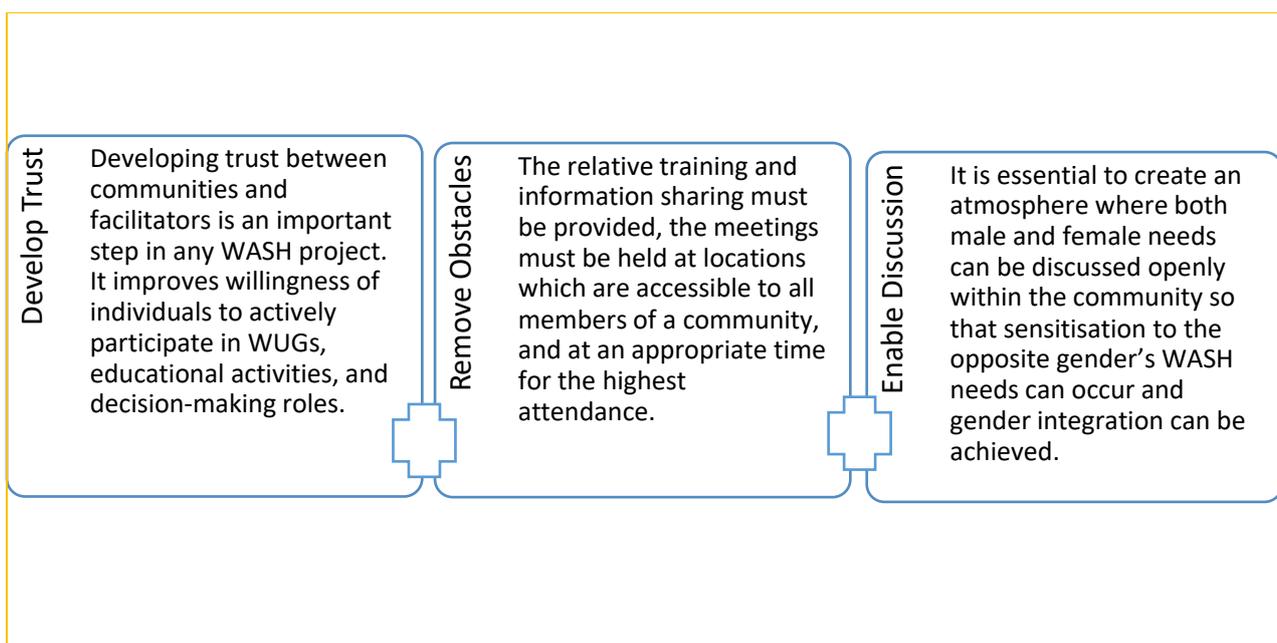
Gender Mainstreaming/ Gender Sensitisation

Gender mainstreaming is the process by which gender is integrated into projects so that women's needs, and the effects of a project on women are assessed and taken into account. In order to achieve gender mainstreaming in WUG projects it is essential to enhance community awareness of women's needs and sensitise each gender to the other's needs and uses for WASH facilities.



Active Participation

Active participation of women in WUGs ensures the sustainability of the committee as it develops a sense of ownership of the water source and sanitation and hygiene facilities and empowers the women through increased security and heightened self-worth.



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Equal representation

An important action is ensuring that women and men are equally represented in decision making roles. To ensure that this happens within a WUG it is important that women are given equal access to the training and information required to hold such a position. This may mean that training sessions need to be held at different times of the day, in different buildings or areas of the village and where possible be facilitated by women as well as men; in Ethiopia facilitators of Water Management Schemes and training must be equal women and men¹⁵

Sometimes women are already participants in WUGs, but in more difficult roles such as membership fees collectors, it is important to clarify that decision-making roles in particular must be equally held by women and men. In Senegal the government has quotas for WUGs, meaning that legally such associations must have 50% of their decision-making positions filled by women.



Peter Caton/Tearfund



Holly Poulter/Tearfund

The active participation of both men and women in WUG meetings can have significant impacts on decision-making

Challenges

Actions

Impacts

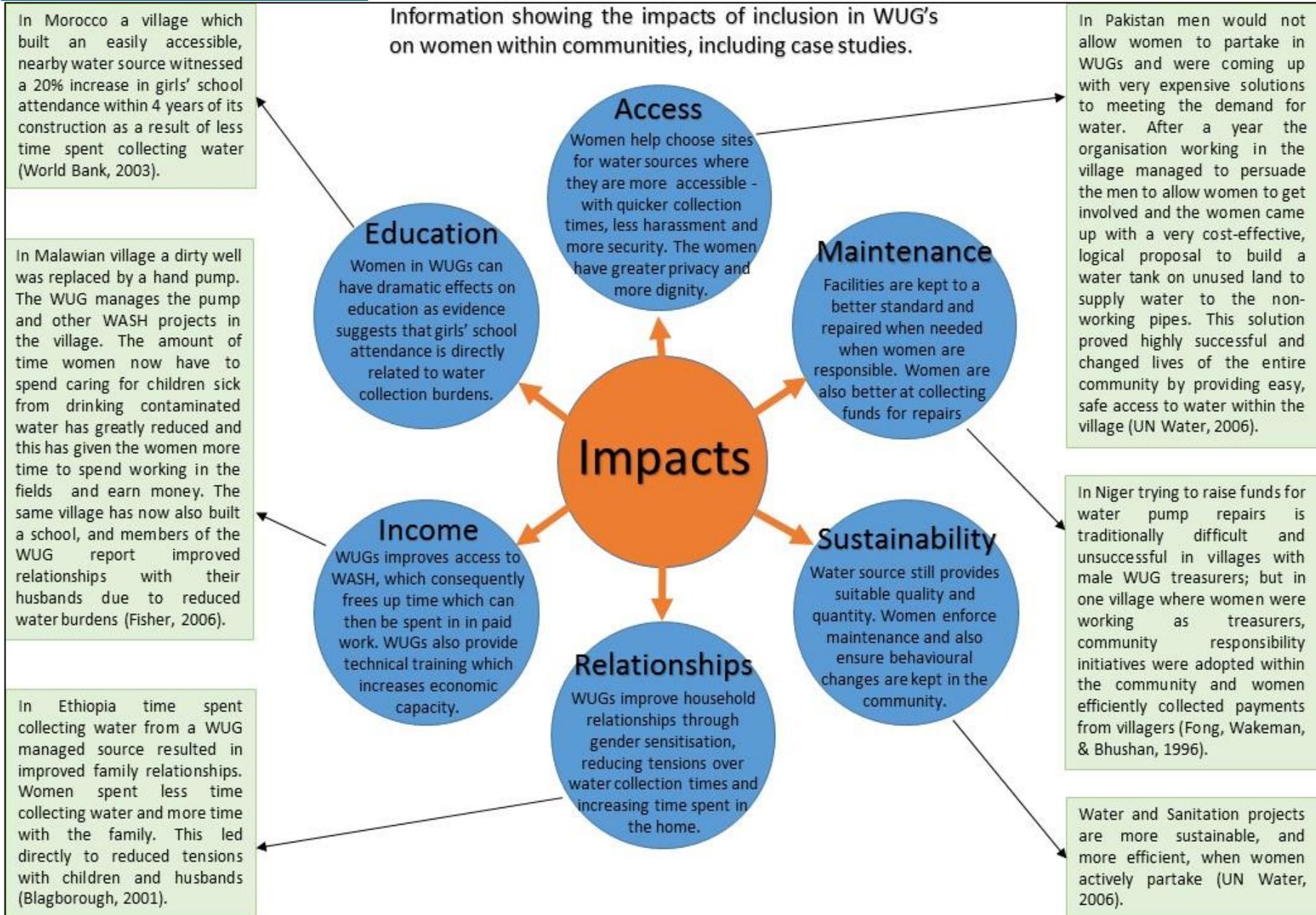
Indicators

Impacts and accomplishments

If the above actions are included in projects then the challenges preventing women from joining WUGs in positions of authority and decision-making roles should be greatly diminished. This section presents the 6 main impacts that can be accomplished when women are involved in WUGs, and provides some examples from case studies. The impacts can be wide ranging, from improved access to WASH facilities and better maintenance of these, to greater sustainability, as well as broader impacts on women's education, improved household and community relationships and increased household income.

¹⁵ WSP, 2010. Mainstreaming Gender in Water and Sanitation. World Bank.

Information showing the impacts of inclusion in WUG's on women within communities, including case studies.



Indicators

Indicators measure the impact of a project and provide evidence that it is meeting its objectives. Below are some examples of useful indicators for projects aiming to increase women's participation in WUGs.

| Topic | Name | Definition |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|---|
| Gender Sensitisation | <i>Activity Attendance</i> | % of community men and women present at Gender Mainstreaming Activities |
| | <i>Education and Awareness</i> | % of men and women educated in opposite gender WASH needs |
| Participation | <i>Training</i> | % of men and women present at Water Scheme Management Training % of men and women present at WUG Management Training |
| | <i>Attendance</i> | % of community men and women present at WUG meetings |
| | <i>WUG roles</i> | Number of decision-making roles within WUG filled by women |
| Contribution | <i>Suggestion</i> | Number of contributions to WUG meetings made by women |
| | <i>Adoption</i> | Number of decisions adopted from women's contributions |
| Outcomes | <i>WASH Maintenance</i> | Decrease in amount of time taken until maintenance activities completed |
| | <i>Non-WASH tasks</i> | Increase in proportion of time spent in non-WASH tasks by women |
| | <i>Family Relationships</i> | Increase in proportion of time spent with family members |
| | <i>Income</i> | Increase in average female income |
| | <i>Education</i> | Increase in number of girls in education |

Summary

This guidance has provided advice on the key considerations which enable the successful inclusion of women in Water User Groups.