Water Justice, Gender and Disability
Guest Editors

Dr. Floriane Clement
Senior researcher and IWMI Gender Focal Point, International Water Management Institute, Nepal

Sylvie Cordier
Disability and Development Specialist, United Kingdom

Dr. Alan Nicol
Strategic Program Leader - Promoting Sustainable Growth, International Water Management Institute, East Africa

Chief Editor

Dr. Anjal Prakash
Programme Coordinator – HI-AWARE, International Center for Integrated Mountain Development, Nepal

Managing Editor

Monica Priya
Research Associate, South Asia Consortium for Interdisciplinary Water Resources Studies, India
Are policies enough to mainstream gender in water and sanitation programs?
Experiences from community managed drinking water supply schemes in India

Snehalatha Mekala
Social Development Consultant, India
Email: Sneha_sreedhar@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper attempts to understand the efforts required in translating policies into practice to mainstream gender in implementing water and sanitation programs. The analysis is based on the data collected from community water plus project using 20 case studies from India on how women are being integrated and how they are performing in their roles as planners, implementers and managers. The findings reveal that in a majority of the case studies women are still being discriminated on the basis of sex, caste, disability, social, economic, and political status. However, if there are intentional and designed efforts by programs backed up by relevant policy then it is possible to achieve gender balance. Evidences from the case studies reveal that given an opportunity, women can manage water supply programs successfully at par with men overcoming barriers, be it technical, administrative, or financial. Case studies also reveal that to demonstrate success there has to be an intensive and continuous support from both Government and Non Government organizations through continuous trainings and hand holding support. It is evident that the mere presence of policies might earn a membership for women in local bodies, but they will not be able to perform their roles effectively unless they are being trained and mentored continuously. Though the paper does not have specific data on integrating persons with disabilities but field observations and focused group discussions bring out that the strategies for integrating women could also be applied and adopted for integrating persons with disabilities and the elderly into mainstream programs with special provisions and specialized professional support. Finally, it can be concluded that if the implementing organizations ensure an enabling environment supported by policy with clear guidelines, then it is certain that gender equity and inclusion can be attained for creating a just society.

Keywords: Gender, Mainstreaming, Women, Policies, Water supply, Disability, Community management

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Introduction

Gender is a concept that refers to socially constructed roles, behavior, activities and attributes that a particular society considers appropriate and ascribes to men and women (WHO, 2009). These distinct roles and the relations between them may give rise to gender inequalities where one group is systematically favored and holds advantages over another, stereotyping the roles and behaviors. Gender equality and empowered women are catalysts for multiplying development efforts. Investments in gender equality yield the highest returns of all development investments (OECD, 2011). Women are most often the users, providers, and managers of water in rural households and are the guardians of household hygiene. If a water system breaks down, women, not men, will most likely be the ones affected, for they may have to travel further for water or may have to find other means to meet the household’s water and sanitation needs (WSP 2010). Though it is important to discuss the role of both men and women equally as part of gender mainstreaming, more focus is given to the latter, as they have been suppressed and oppressed for time eternally. Women perform 66 percent of the world’s work, and produce 50 percent of the food, yet earn only 10 percent of the income and own only one percent of the property. Whether the issue is improving education in the developing world, or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part of the equation (Clinton 2009).

Similar to women, another group that is deprived of being in the mainstream is “Persons with Disabilities”. It is not just the personal impairment, which causes the difficulty but the discrimination or denial by the society barring them from being a part of the development process. This denial is categorized as the “social model of disability” which sees the issue of "disability" as a socially created problem and a matter of the full integration of individuals into society. In this model, disability is not an attribute of an individual, but rather a complex collection of conditions, many of which are created by the social environment (Disabled World 2010). The issue is both cultural and ideological, requiring individual, community, and large-scale social change. Similar to the case of women, persons with disabilities often lack access to the committees or local bodies due to myths about non-performance and social stigma attached to the disability status. The disabled and the elderly are disproportionately under-represented. Over one billion people globally have some kind of impairment (WHO 2011), and are more likely to be poor than the general population (Hosseinpour et al, 2013). For the last three decades many policies and programs have been dovetailed to bring these suppressed stakeholders to be a part of the mainstream, however the field reality shows a slow progress.

After attaining independence, the Government of India, initially decided to pave a path to bring about social change based on three major areas, viz., constitutional and legal reforms, planned development based on mixed economy, and state support to social welfare activities. All these three policies are expected to create a democratic, just, and prosperous society. All these three steps have an impact on the status of women. Framing of the Five Year Plans was the first major step taken in the direction of women's development. The initial Five Year Plans were focused more on welfare and viewed women as beneficiaries. For the first time, the Eighth Five year plan focused on ensuring that the benefits of development from different sectors did not bypass women and special programs were implemented to complement the general programs. The approach of the Eighth Plan saw a definite shift from development to empowerment, extension of qualitative and quantitative services to women and suppression of categories directly. Further there has been a progressive increase in the plan outlays from rupees four crores in the First Five Year Plan (1951 – 56) to rupees 2000 Crores in the Eighth Five Year Plan (Pal 2013). Complementing the Eighth Plan the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendment Act is a major milestone and a turning point for women in India, as the historic date of 24 April 1993 witnessed reservation of 1/3 of seats for women in all elected offices of local bodies, in rural and urban areas (Planning Commission 1992). In the rural areas, women have thus been brought to the centre-stage in the nation’s efforts to strengthen democratic institutions. The Tenth Plan (2002-2007) emphasized on Women Component Plan (WCP) and gender budgeting, which is complementary to each other in securing women’s interest all over the world. While the Eleventh Five Year Plan focused on lowering the gender gap in literacy to 10 percentage point by increasing the percentage of each cohort going to higher education from the present 10% to 15% (Desai 1986). With reference to water, the
Ministry of Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation through National Rural Drinking Water Program (NRDWP) guidelines made a provision that all the Village Water & Sanitation Committees (VWSC) formed should have 50% women & proportionate representation for SC, ST & Minorities as a standing committee of the Gram Panchayat for all villages in the District. Through this policy it is made clear that both men and women have distinct roles to play and it is important to fully involve both in demand-driven water and sanitation programs, where communities decide what type of systems they want, willingness to contribute to and management of service delivery.

Similarly there are provisions for the Persons with Disability as per the Equal Opportunities, Protection of Rights and Full Participation Act of 1995 which brought sharp focus to the State's responsibility in empowering the disabled with equal opportunities, protection of rights, and equal participation in the development process of the nation. It clearly lays down that education and employment opportunities must be created for the disabled by providing three per cent reservation. Five Year Plans mention that policies and programs should focus on making the disabled as active (as possible), self-reliant, and productive contributors to the national economy through the enactment of the Disability Act. Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment (MSJE) while collating comments from the draft National Policy for Persons with Disability in 2005, stated that a policy and supporting structure of services to ensure that disabled people have equal opportunities for productive and gainful employment would be adopted. But nothing has happened so far. The very fact that disabled people are looked on as a “special group” by MSJE segregates them from the mainstream, and reiterates the charity view rather than a development perspective, wherein there is no scope for “empowerment”, as reported by Shankar (2006).

However, translating these policies into practice seems a distant reality as revealed by Udas (2006). However, the mere existence of the policy seems to have contributed to (or perhaps been part of) a change in the dominant discourse, gradually changing the idea that ‘public decision making is a men-only affair’, making it less normal and accepted.

There are also documented instances where women have made use of the quota system and their participation to voice their water concerns. However, in many cases, women members of WUAs seemed to be members on paper only, with meeting the quota being the sole aim of their attendance (Chhetri 1999). Another important barrier appears to be the caste factor. While analyzing the rhetoric reforms of drinking water sector Joshi (2011) found that a complex entwining of caste and gender consistently defined water allocation and access among users and entrenched fractures in the structure and culture of the policy-implementing and regulatory institutions. Further she states that the drinking water sector is an excellent example of flawed policies, which have sustained the convenient fractures of a divisive society.

On the other hand, there are many islands of success in gender mainstreaming by NGOs and Projects with targeted approaches. In an urban resettlement project funded by Asian Development Bank where women were deemed to benefit from the project equally with men, but it was only possible in the resettlement plan where women were specifically targeted and the benefits were accrued by empowering them into groups and by allocating the flats on their names (ADB 2011). In another example PRIA, an NGO working intensively on gender mainstreaming, revealed that concerted efforts on the part of employing organizations could go a long way in ensuring gender sensitivity in the workplace. If heads of teams endorse the need for gender awareness and equality, these concepts will percolate down to all the employees and reiterate the importance of this concern (UNDP 2008).

As discussed above, the Governments and Non Government Organizations are making enormous efforts to convert the policies into practice but there are mixed results on the ground and only few organizations, few programs, and few villages are able to witness the success. Keeping this background in view an attempt has been made to understand the key issues of how men and women were involved in the process of planning and implementing the water supply schemes implemented by various organizations and what key roles they have been playing in sustainable service delivery as part of the

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9 Gram Panchayat is a decentralized local institution at the village level which received funds from the Government and is responsible to implement all the Government programs through its elected representatives.
community water plus project. Further the paper focuses on the specific strategies and activities that were designed to mainstream gender while implementing the programs. Though the paper lacks specific data on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and the elderly but during the discussions these issues were covered and hence discussed in the findings.

**Research design and methodology**

Through its research partners in India, Cranfield University developed the conceptual framework and research protocols to study the enabling environment (policies and organizations at national, state, and district), performance of community service providers (village/Panchayat/community level organizations), and the quality of service received by the households. The research was conducted by selecting 20 successfully managed community water supply programs across the seventeen States in India after scanning over 161 community-managed rural water supply programs in consultation with sector stakeholders and desk review using a stratified purposive sampling approach. The covered states were selected based on low, middle and high-income categories, social development indicators, and a range of hydro geological conditions. To understand each of the cases in detail, four villages were selected (one failure and three success villages) and in-depth surveys were conducted to elicit data combining qualitative and quantitative research methods. Thus the total sample included 80 villages (60 success and 20 control villages) and 2355 households (30 households from each village). Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted to assess the participation and involvement of women in Village Water and Sanitation Committees (VWSCs) and individual interviews were conducted with selected women to understand the issues of gender mainstreaming more clearly (272 key informant interviews and 130 FGDs). The table below provides a snap shot of the total sample covered under the research.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of case studies</th>
<th>Number of States covered</th>
<th>Number of Villages covered</th>
<th>Number of FGDs with VWSCs and communities</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>80 (60 success and 20 control)</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>2355</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Data collected for the community water plus project during 2013-15*

**Findings and discussion**

The main findings of the study have been discussed at length in the following sections detailing the efforts made by the NGOs and Governments to ensure gender mainstreaming in implementing the water supply programs. The findings have been categorized under various headings of project implementation so as to enable easy understanding and clarity in presenting the data. The research was more focused on gender, however an attempt was made to collect data on persons with disabilities but in most cases the records did not have the disaggregated data to know the specific details hence could not be presented but the field observations and FGDs covered some of these issues. Hence where applicable the possible interventions needed for mainstreaming the persons with disabilities were also discussed.

**Women as office bearers and members in VWSCs**

The case studies clearly bring out that across all 20 cases the reserved seats for women are being diligently filled up without violating the Government norms. It is encouraging to see that in some successful cases the VWSCs had 100 percent women members as office bearers and members. In the case

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³ Please note that the Community water plus project findings and conclusions have been submitted as a book to Earth scan and it is in the process of getting published into book very soon. Hence some content and analysis will be reflected in the upcoming book.
of the committees where men were present, women were denied of the leadership roles except for women sarpanches who had become the presidents of the VWSCs by default due to the Government order. Discussions reveal that in general women are discriminated against but if they belong to weaker/poorer sections or lower castes or are persons with disabilities then the discrimination is doubled fold. The women belonging to elite sections get preference in choosing their positions while the other categories have to satisfy themselves with whatever is offered within the 33 percent. The power politics dominates and certain caste groups, elder persons, and persons with disabilities get intentionally suppressed or left out and the benefits get diverted to undeserving beneficiaries.

It could be seen from the table below that 15 out of the 20 case studies followed the Government norms and 30 percent seats have been occupied by women while men occupied 70 percent, except in five cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of the case</th>
<th>% of women in VWSCs</th>
<th>% of Men in VWSCs</th>
<th>Name of the case</th>
<th>% of women in VWSCs</th>
<th>% of Men in VWSCs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat: WASMO (Gandhinagar)</td>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>0-20</td>
<td>Tamilnadu I</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gujarat: WASMO (Bhuj)</td>
<td>70-50</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>Tamilnadu II</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AP/Telangana (RO)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maharashtra</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala I (Kodur)</td>
<td>0-20</td>
<td>80-100</td>
<td>Odisha (Gram Vikas)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kerala II (Nenmeni)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Chattisgarh</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sikkim</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Jharkhand</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meghalay</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>0-30</td>
<td>70-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madhya Pradesh</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>Himachal Pradesh</td>
<td>No data</td>
<td>No data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karnataka</td>
<td>30-50</td>
<td>70-50</td>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Community Water plus Project 2013-15

The percentage is 50 to 100 given the intensive efforts of the implementing agencies.

In Gujarat, WASMO provided women with a platform to voice their issues by making it mandatory to have at least one third of women members in the Pani Samitis (VWSCs). In Gandhinagar District, Motipura Veda village had 100% women, while in Amarpura Kherna 96% members and leaders were women indicating the efforts of WASMO in mobilizing women to demand and create space for themselves. While in control villages women were confined to 33% reservation by filling four out of eleven positions. While in Kutch district, two villages had

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4 Sarpanch: The local elected leader of the grass root level decentralized government organization (Panchayat) responsible for the implementation of development programs at the village level.

5 WASMO is an independent organization created by the Government with autonomous operational responsibility to exclusively work on empowering the people in Gujarat to own the water and sanitation programs ensuring sustainability.
50% women and one village had 100% while the control village had only 30 percent women. The States of Odisha (Gram Vikas⁶), Jharkhand (Public Health Engineering Department), West Bengal (Water For People) had 50%-60% women in the VWSGs which could be attributed to the intensive and innovative efforts of the implementing agencies to motivate women to be the members of the committees. The World Bank assisted projects in Karnataka and Kerala also had women representation at 50%, which is due to the mandatory guidelines and is a pre-requisite for VWSC formation as per the World Bank rules. These special efforts by the GOs and NGOs not only empowered women but also ensured efficient and effective functionality of the water committees as women took it as a challenge to demonstrate their capabilities of providing better services.

In Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Sikkim, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu the Government norms of 30% were followed, however women in these committees were just passive observers who just sign the registers while most of the times their husbands/sons/brothers participate in the meetings. Detailed enquiries reveal that “women are still not allowed to go and sit along with men”, “discussions are dominated by men with no choice or voice for women”, “do not understand the discussions as they involve money and technical matters”, “no time given the household chores”, “not interested” etc. The elderly and people with disabilities expressed similar views and most of them said they are not aware of the meetings and committees being formed. The study did not collect specific data due to non-availability; even the records at the Panchayat level lack data on persons with disabilities.

Though women empowerment index values are high in Kerela, the Kodur Panchayat (Public Health Engineering Department implemented case study) reflects low participation of women. But in the same state wherever World Bank assisted water supply programs were implemented (Nenmeni) the participation is very high with women occupying 50 percent membership. Women from these committees act as Executive Committee Directors, members of zonal committees, and are slowly entering local politics indicating the necessity of special efforts from implementing agencies. In the case of the North East state of Meghalaya, the traditional structure “Durbar” (equal to that of Panchayat) takes care of the drinking water supply systems apart from their traditional local administrative responsibilities and women are not part of these committees. Women have a separate committee to perform cultural activities and celebrate community festivals limiting and confining their role to home based activities rather than being part of the mainstream development.

The discussion above clearly indicates that if the implementing organizations intentionally design strategies to integrate women, with special efforts to mobilize, motivate, and build their capacities, then they are able to perform effectively as VWSC office bearers and members on par with men. Some of the NGOs and World Bank assisted programs had 100 percent women committees, as they were able to sensitize the men to provide an opportunity for women to completely take over the committees and some of the implementing organizations felt that women when given power can independently run the water committees giving space to their voices and choices. Social mobilizers were front line workers and women staff members were the main catalytic change agents in bringing in this warranted change process breaking all the barriers and myths. Similar strategies need to be adopted if we have to bring the persons with disabilities or elders into mainstream development.

**Women as “planners and implementers” of the water schemes**

The myth that only men can understand the technical nitty-gritties seems to dominate in most of the Rural Water Supply and Sanitation Department /PHED implemented case studies while the NGO and World Bank promoted case studies did reveal that women can also actively contribute to the designing of the water schemes and they do have knowledge about the water sources, slopes, seasonal variations of the source, and could effectively suggest locations for erecting stand posts or hand pumps. The lessons from the experiences of the NGOs reveal that by consulting women they could bring more innovations to their schemes. For eg. Gram Vikas developed gender sensitive designs and provided

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⁶ Gram Vikas is an NGO with a Head office in Orissa working in seven states, more about Gram Vikas can be seen following the link [http://www.gramvikas.org/](http://www.gramvikas.org/)
three taps, one in the toilet, one in the bathroom, and one in the kitchen according to the choices of women at the household level. WASMO had taken extra efforts in creating an enabling environment during the planning stage of the project (lasted for six months) by involving women in Focus Group Discussions and in preparation of Village Action Plans to find out the needs and preferred choices of women to integrate into the technical plans. The World Bank assisted programs made participatory plans involving all the stakeholders and specific needs of women were taken into consideration at each stage. Since women were made part of the program from the planning through to implementation, the ownership on the assets had been automatically developed leading to better operation and maintenance ensuring sustainable service delivery.

In the case of Kerala, women in general have an overall understanding of the issues on water and have a strong voice to raise their concerns or give opinions due to their education status and also being a part of a matriarchal society. The people's participation in Kerala actually originated with women's participation in planning and development activities, through the 'ayalkoottams' (neighborhood committees). Further continuous trainings imparted by the local institutions to make them understand their roles and responsibilities of being the members in the various committees. Though the reservation system entails only 33% of women in elected bodies, but due to their proactive participation many committees have more than 60 percent women in the local bodies, be it the Panchayats, VWSCs, Forest Committees, Health Committees, or Village Development Committees. This indicates that the policy coupled with intentional efforts could yield better results and it is important for the implementing agencies to understand these local dynamics for making women effective planners and implementers.

In Meghalaya women’s role is not visible and they are confined to household chores. Traditionally, the women are kept away from participating in any administration/implementation of development programs for the reason that the men see it as their domain to make decisions. When enquired, the male leaders said “we do take the views of women informally at home and that is enough, they need not be part of the committees” and “as per our tradition women participating in the meetings or attending common forum along with men is not permitted”. The discussions with women revealed that since they know their limitation they stay away willingly from the committees to avoid conflicts but if given a chance to participate they are ready to explore and prove their potential by managing the water committees. Further, women added, “When we can perform the cultural activities and village fests successfully why not the other programs which involve similar tasks? And if we receive trainings like our men do then we sure will be able to deliver similar or better results”. Women also revealed that even now we influence the VWSC and get our activities done without participating in the meetings. In Sikkim, Women are participating in discussions and are part of the planning process mainly through the ward committees as part of the decentralized governance. The discussions with them revealed that they are aware of all the activities of water committees and they do participate at par with the men and solve the problems as and when they arise.

The lessons learnt from above could also be applied in case the persons with disabilities, elderly, and people with special needs as they also require specific strategies, activities, and trainings to make them a part of development programs. As women could identify their specific needs and choices, even these groups need to identify their own needs which could be addressed and integrated into the plans to improve their access to and use of resources making them self reliable. In fact bringing persons with disabilities into the mainstream development requires special attention and they have to be consulted in a sensitive manner and counseled in a professional way to break their psychological and physical barriers.

Women as decision makers

In majority of the cases, especially the PHED implemented water schemes, women’s role was confined to membership on paper and their participation in decision making seems a distant

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Footnote: 7 Matriarchy is not just about descent and inheritance being traced through the female line. The matriarchal system means a system where women have power in “all activities relating to allocation, exchange and production, as well as socio-cultural and political power.” (https://nitawriter.wordpress.com/2008/03/19/meghalaya-and-kerala-status-of-women/)
dream. Women hardly attend meetings and some of them simply sign the registers without even attending the meetings. Most of the times the husbands/sons act as phantom leaders and attend the meetings on behalf of their wives/mothers leaving them with no opportunities for awareness, learning, and participation. FGDs with women reveal that they do not demand or claim their position as they are scared of the consequences of acting against the wish of their fathers, husbands, or sons and some of them claim to be busy with their household chores or agricultural operations while others simply say “why do we need it?”. Further zooming in brings out that women from poor families, lower caste, and were illiterate were not even informed or invited to the meetings while the elite got the information through their networks. However there are exceptional cases such as Gujarat, Odisha, Karnataka, and Kerala where women act as key decision makers in both technical and administrative matters. Women from these committees revealed that they were very scared in the beginning to express their views but continuous training, mentoring, and interaction with officers, villagers, and NGO staff has taught them how to assess various factors before taking decisions. Interactions with WASMO and NGO officials revealed that appointing women training coordinators and social mobilizers did reap fruits, as with their support rural women were able to express their inhibitions freely and the same could be resolved with proper counseling. In Kerala all the ward members, executive committee members, and governing body members follow a consultative decision making process and this could be attributed to the advanced decentralized Panchayat system and high literacy levels. However, in the second case from Kerala, the woman Sarpanch is very active but somehow the water committees do not have women attending meetings or participating in decision making due to the lack of external agencies supporting them, unlike in World Bank Assisted Program.

The case study findings reveal that it is not easy to break the stereotypes of men dominating the water domain and breaking these myths requires intensive and rigorous efforts by the experienced professionals. A well designed strategy with enough opportunities and time for women to learn can make them good decision makers to complement their roles while implementing water supply programs. This analysis and suggestions can be easily applied and adopted for mainstreaming the persons with disabilities, the elderly, and people with special needs. It takes intensive efforts and negotiations to make them part of the committees in the absence of a clear policy about their reservations; making them active decision makers requires handholding support and continuous mentoring. The organizations working specifically for persons with disabilities can play an important role in providing these services and prepare them to be part of the committees. However, it might be difficult given that there is no clear provision in the policy.

Women as financial managers and book keepers

Financial management and book keeping is one area where women are hardly involved. In most cases all financial transactions are dealt by men and women do not get any space or opportunity to interact about the transactions. Though women have vast experience in Self Help Group management, their skills are not valued enough and women are confined to passive attendance and simple signatures. However, wherever they are given such responsibility they are able to perform very well. In Gram Vikas, where women are appointed as secretaries/cashiers, the committee members expressed that they are better custodians of accounts given their experience of managing the household expenses. In Singhpura village of Punjab (World Bank project) a woman accountant meticulously manages all the registers including the cash books, measurement records, minutes register, visitors register etc. Women members in both Gandhinagar and Kutch district are able to process the information and communicate effectively to the Gramsabha, including all the financial details, keeping the principles of transparency and integrity as central. In Shinay village, a woman was recruited for the position of computer operator though she doesn't have an educational background in the subject. But her interest encouraged her to learn the subject and she managed to computerize all the records in the office and generates receipts for the water bills. In the Andhra Pradesh and Telangana case studies women are being trained as technicians for operation and maintenance of the Reverse Osmosis Plants, apart

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8 Gramsabha is the general body meeting of the village where all the households participate to make decisions with consensus.
from managing the finances. They are efficiently managing the customer relations, the collection of water user charges, and expenditure detail, keeping all the records intact. In case of Jharkhand, jalsahiyas⁹ are trained as secretaries and are managing both finances and administrative work. These examples are only islands of success from individual cases but it is not same across all the case studies.

It could be understood from the cases that financial management portfolio has not been integrated or designed to promote women's participation across the cases even in those cases where they are actively participating. This component requires special strategies as men strongly consider it to be their domain of expertise. To bring more women into this forte a well structured and concentrated efforts are needed to identify the women who have an aptitude for numbers to manage the finances. They need to be specifically trained, while the rest of the committee's members can be given general orientation and awareness on financial management.

**Women office bearers - trainings and capacity building by implementing agencies**

In general there are no specific guidelines to train the women who become members through the 30 percent reservation and there is no focus on providing them handholding support, at least in the beginning, clearly explaining their roles and responsibilities. They get exposed to the program along with men through mobilization and awareness building that men are accustomed to but not the women. The Government/PHED led case studies show that there were no trainings given; hence the functionality of the VWSCs is jeopardized. Only in the case of Jharkhand, the jalsahiyas were trained extensively to enable them in record keeping and water quality testing. In order to retain the trained persons within the village, the bhatus (daughters in law of the village) are selected as Jalsahiyas so that there is lesser chance of them leaving the villages, unlike daughters who may move away after marriage. This effort of PHE department resulted in building awareness among women and they are now able to maintain the records on par with men.

WASMO has been a forerunner in enhancing the capacities of women by facilitating training programs for women empowerment; and in the year 2012-13, a total of 133 such programs have been organized in the entire state of Gujarat. Apart from this, WASMO also takes the water committees to the best performing villages for exposure visits for cross learning and to instill motivation among the women to perform better after witnessing the success of their counterparts in other villages. In World Bank assisted programs of Karnataka, Kerala, and Punjab, the water committee members are trained; however, there are no specific trainings for women. In most of the cases the trainings are limited to raising awareness and there are no efforts to boost the morale of women for participation in water supply management.

The case studies reveal that trainings and handholding support are the most essential component and there is a need for more structured and focused training programs for women who are participating in the water supply programs. Further the training programs must cover various themes ranging from technical, administrative, financial, asset management etc. The training venues and locations have to meet gender sensitivity ideals and should be safe and protective. The same analysis is applicable when persons with disabilities and the elderly have to be made part of the training programs. Specialized training programs need to be designed and the venues should be equipped with disabled-friendly infrastructure and facilities such as railings, smooth surfaces, wheel chair tracks etc. As observed in the field most of the training venues lack such facilities especially the bathrooms, path ways, dining rooms etc., making it difficult for persons with disabilities and the elderly to skip or avoid attending the training programs.

**Women in review and monitoring of the service delivery**

It is very important to monitor the water service delivery everyday for ensuring continued supply of good quality and quantity of water. In majority of the cases the men are taking the responsibility for, or employing an attender, to check the water supply and monitor the O&M. However, since only one individual is responsible for these, people find it difficult to lodge a complaint or report any concern about the water supply status if the responsible person can't be found. To overcome such scenarios in the case of

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⁹ Jalsahiyas are the daughter in laws of the village who are trained in accounts and book keeping for VWSCs
Karnataka, women came up with an innovative idea. They distributed the areas of the village among themselves according to their house location to monitor the services regularly. This process was less cumbersome and took less time. The effort for each individual was reduced as the work got distributed among all the committee members and everyone learned in the process. Every fortnight the service delivery issues were discussed and if there were any emergencies then the problems were addressed immediately, meeting the expenses from the funds of the committee. In majority of the success cases the water quality testing kits have not been used properly and there is no regular quality testing done by the department. Further, the monitoring methods should be simple and accessible for every individual to administer. The same suggestions hold good if we are dealing with persons with disabilities and those with special needs; the simpler the methods the easier it is for everyone to participate.

Sanitation is a bonus when women take the lead in VWSC

It is interesting to note that wherever women were active in the committees the sanitation component had been automatically addressed. Women could easily mobilize the households for construction of toilets and the continuous vigilance on open defecation ensured regular usage of these toilets. Further the NGOs supported women and complemented their efforts in achieving the open defecation free villages.

However, the daunting issue is that most or all of the toilets (community/individual/school/hospital) built did not support its usage by persons with disabilities and by the elderly due to the lack of technical knowledge about how simple infrastructure like handles, railings, floor with grips, etc. could make these toilets accessible for all. One of the reasons for this situation could be that the elders, persons with disabilities, and people with special needs are never part of the planning process. They are always discriminated and not given information or technical details hindering their participation.

Do women staff members matter in implementing agencies?

After analyzing the success cases, it was found that having women staff members/field coordinators is one of the key criteria to mobilize women as in rural areas they could easily share and empathize with the women staff members. Even men felt that it is safer for their women to interact with women employees rather than the male staff members. Though there are benefits in having women staff, especially as engineers, in the implementing organizations but the reality of field statistics are very discouraging. Staffing patterns across RWSS/PHED reveal that in the state of Chhattisgarh there is only one woman engineer for the entire state. In many of the other states women engineers made up 0.5 to 1% of all engineers in the state, as indicated in table 3. This finding clearly supports the fact that there are restrictions for women even in education and they are being discouraged to take up technical fields, or

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total Engineers</th>
<th>Women Engineers</th>
<th>% of women engineers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uttarakhand</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Punjab</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rajasthan</td>
<td>2281</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipur</td>
<td>287</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nagaland</td>
<td>211</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mizoram</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Bengal</td>
<td>784</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: As reported by the RWSS officials during the Community Water Plus S project workshop, 2015

Table 3: Percentage representation of men and women in the water and sanitation committees
for that matter any higher degree, due to complex social and cultural contexts limiting their career growth.

When enquired about, some of the officers cited reasons such as, “women do not prefer field based positions”, “field trips cause disturbance to their household chores hence avoid”, “preference to stay near to the towns”, “traditions and cultural norms and discouragement from family members” etc. Further, some of the women officers expressed that they prefer to work in administrative positions, which do not require travel. Further the women officers perceived that it is not always easy to talk to the politicians, local leaders and contractors to get the works done. However they expressed that the younger generations are proactive and more women engineers are enrolling into the department as part of the new recruitment. There is an urgent need to train these young officials on the importance of mobilizing women to be part of water supply schemes.

**Strategies for bringing gender balance in water supply and sanitation programs**

Based on the learnings from case studies and the literature review the following suggestions need to be considered for designing effective strategies to bring gender balance that includes the people with disabilities, people with special needs, and the elderly.

**Government policy is a prerequisite**

Having policies in place is crucial for bringing women, differently abled, and people with special needs into mainstream development. It is these policies that direct the efforts of various governments and provide individuals the authority and direction on how to achieve the desired goal of gender balance, and the larger inclusion of every category of people.

**Translating the policy into practice**

Once the right policy is in place, the next step is to translate it into simplified steps that percolate from national to village level duly touching state, district and block levels. Often the policies are not translated up to the beneficiary level leaving a huge gap between policy and practice. Brief policy orientations need to be conducted at various levels to bring the desired attitudinal changes creating enabling environments. Further, repeated changes/amendments should not be encouraged until the policy is properly ingrained at the beneficiary level. Continuous modifications delay the whole process and leave people confused regarding what and how to adopt.

**The essential 3 Ms (Mobilizing, Motivating, Mentoring)**

Learning from the case studies, it’s very important to carefully structure and design the sequence of activities to achieve gender balance by making women and men equal partners. First M is about Mobilization, and these activities need to be planned with two aims; one is to break the barriers for women to participate in programs while the second aim is to sensitize men to support and encourage their women to open up new windows of opportunities. The second M is about Motivating women to gain self-confidence while targeting men to change their behavior to accept the change process. Finally the third M is about mentoring the women through and through with handholding support in day-to-day operations of the committees till they gain command over the subject. Similarly when we target to include people with disabilities and special needs we need to mobilize and motivate them to be a part of the programs with continuous mentoring and counseling while the other people (men and women) need to be sensitized on the need to accept them and agree on the changes to be made to the regular program if need be.

**Trainings and Capacity building**

Continuous and updated trainings need to be planned and implemented for both men and women using gender sensitive training platforms, venues and themes. Specific training sessions need to be organized separately for men and women on how to handle the change process respecting each other’s space and choices. Similarly there has to be specialized training components to integrate persons with disabilities, elderly or people with special needs. This can be made possible by involving organizations specially working for the disabled as they are professionalized to cater to the needs of the elderly.

**Women coordinators/ engineers/ facilitators as catalysts**

Having women as catalysts of change in gendering process will ease women to freely express their inhibitions and will help them express their doubts easily. Similarly in order to deal with the disabled and
the elderly there is a need to involve trained professionals who understand the physical and psychological barriers of the persons with disability and guide, supervise, motivate and inspire them while also explaining how they could make a difference in participating in the development programs.

Conclusions and Policy Implications:

Reforms that can transform entrenched inequities require a drastic political overhaul, not only in the formulation of implementable policies, but equally in the structure and culture of policy and in implementing and regulatory institutions (Joshi D 2011). Gender balance and equitable opportunities for all the sections of the society can be achieved only when there are appropriate policies designed and putting place supported by intentional efforts of the implementing organizations to demonstrate and achieve results on the ground. Based on the successful cases, one can conclude that there is a need for special efforts both in staffing patterns and strategies to mainstream women, persons with disabilities and elderly by providing special platforms to express their opinions, voices, choices and preferences. Having mere reservations might earn them a membership status but do not yield expected results unless it is supported by mentoring, counseling, training and hand holding with the support from NGOs, special drive organizations and institutes designed for training and capacity building. Various innovative programs and trainings are needed to break the barriers and obstacles of passive participation of women into active performance exploring their potential and skills by closely monitoring their performance and building their capacities where required. Evidence from field reveals that women are better book keepers, water tariff collectors and custodians of the assets hence, these capacities of women have to be carefully harnessed and nurtured for future program designing. Similarly the capacities of the persons with disabilities need to be explored and efforts should be made to bring the policies and practices to mainstream them especially in the water supply programs. Further to bridge the participation gaps highly skilled and specialized professionals need to be hired to guide, supervise, motivate and inspire these disadvantaged groups without hurting their sensitive feelings for achieving a just society.

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