

### **3.3 Gender, Water and Poverty**

#### **Introduction**

Water is essential to human beings and all forms of life. But pollution and lack of access to clean water is proliferating the cycle of poverty, water-borne diseases, and gender inequities (Khosla and Pearl, 2003). Water is an entry point for sustainable development, poverty eradication, human rights, reproductive and maternal health, combating HIV and AIDS, energy production, improved education for girls and a reduction in morbidity and mortality. And yet there are still 1.1 billion people without access to safe drinking water and 2.6 billion without access to adequate sanitation. This situation has an enormous negative impact on women and children.

There is deepening poverty worldwide, and the most vulnerable groups are women and children. Women experience poverty differently than men, as they are generally treated unequally. It is estimated that, of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty around the world, 70% are women. Women work two-thirds of the world's working hours, produce half of the world's food, and yet earn only 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property (UN Millennium Campaign, 2005).

#### **Why gender, water and poverty?**

In 1997, the Human Development Report revealed that countries with the lowest gender-related development indices (Sierra Leone, Niger, Burkina Faso and Mali) also had high poverty rates and little access to water, health and education. Other countries with high poverty rates (Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and Paraguay) also had high rates of social, gender and ethnic inequality (Schreiner, 2001).

#### **Linkages among gender, water and poverty**

- Access to water of sufficient quality and quantity will reduce the incidence of water-washed and water-borne diseases, improve health and productivity for women and attendance in schools for children.
- When there is competition for water resources, women and the vulnerable often lose their entitlements.
- Women's development priorities for water resources may be for sources nearer homes so that they are able to balance their productive and reproductive roles. If they are not consulted, then these priorities will not be considered.
- Improved livelihoods and food security for women and the disadvantaged are also dependent on access to sufficient water resources.
- Participation in water management can also improve the dignity of women through giving them a voice and choice. It also improves targeting and efficiency.

Women are more vulnerable than men to chronic poverty due to gender inequalities in various social, economic and political institutions. Such inequalities can be found in the uneven distribution of income, control over property or income and access to productive inputs (such as credit), decision-making resources and water resources, rights and entitlements that often favour men in opposition to women. Women are also subject to bias and social exclusion in labour markets.

According to the United Nations Development Programme, five years after world leaders signed a commitment towards reducing poverty, “the gap between MDG targets for halving poverty and projected outcomes is equivalent to an additional 380 million people in developing countries living on less than a dollar a day.” Women and children carry an unequal burden of deepening poverty.

### **Definitional Misconceptions**

Poverty is multi-dimensional, location specific and varies by age, culture, gender and other socio-economic aspects. Perceptions of poverty also differ from women to men: for example, in Ghana men defined poverty as the inability to generate income, while women viewed it as food insecurity (Narayan, 2000).

Poverty is not only about material deprivation; it also includes a lack of voice or power, vulnerability to crises and other adverse situations and limited capacity to cope with such vulnerabilities. If water resources are located far away from homes, women and girls have to walk further to collect water, thus reducing the time available for productive work. Effective water management offers social networks for women through management committees, but very often women end up doing unskilled and unpaid work related to water management. Continuing to link poverty to material well-being masks other dimensions of poverty, such as powerlessness and exclusion from decision making.

### **Measuring poverty: the gender dilemma**

The traditional methods of measuring poverty have been through Gross Domestic Product or household income statistics, masking gender differentials within the household. Participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) are an instrument for including poor women’s and men’s views in the analysis of poverty and the formulation of strategies to reduce it through public policy interventions (Norton, 2001).

### **Gender, Poverty and the Environment: A three-way interaction**

While separate Millennium Development Goals have been set for poverty, gender and the environment (encompassing water and sanitation), they are interrelated and there is a three-way interaction among them. Water is essential for the well being of human beings, vital for economic development and a basic requirement for the health of ecosystems. Clean water for domestic purposes is essential for human health and survival and, combined with improved sanitation and hygiene, it will reduce morbidity and mortality especially among children. Water is also vital for other facets of sustainable development such as environmental protection, food security, empowerment of women, education of girls and reduction in productivity loss due to illnesses. Water is a catalytic entry point for developing countries in the fight against poverty and hunger, and for safeguarding human health, reducing child mortality and promoting gender equality and protection of natural resources (UN Millennium Task Force on Water and Sanitation, 2005).

The HIV and AIDS pandemic, which is both a cause and a consequence of the vulnerability that is characteristic of poverty, has driven some countries to adopt home-based care approaches as health institutions fail to cope with the demand for services. The home-based care approach implies that there should be water of sufficient quality and quantity to avoid secondary infections as well as to reduce the burdens of care-givers, who, in most cases, are women and girls.

### **Some Policy Implications**

In IWRM, water is viewed as both an economic, environmental and a social good, and thus in some cases it can be considered a commodity responding to the principles of supply and demand. It thus has a market value determined for certain uses (Thomas, Schalkwyk and Woroniuk, 1996). The water sector is often divided into productive and non-productive water uses. The non-productive uses of water (health, domestic chores and sanitation) tend to be the responsibility of women and are not considered in economic assessments. These should be incorporated into the assessment of relative economic values of water resources to allow for the understanding and consideration of the interdependence between productive and domestic water.

Water as a commodity implies that the development of water resources should be based on demand. However, poor women are generally unable to express their demands for services, nor do they have the capacity to defend their rights, especially if there are recognisable and transferable property rights over water. In addition, children-headed households have even lower capacity to express demand and defend their rights.

In order to meet the water demands of poor women, governments must collect sex-disaggregated data and develop gender-sensitive indicators in all sectors, including water, sanitation, agriculture and irrigation. The use of participatory tools is also important for engaging the voiceless and less educated who may have difficulties understanding written text. Only this way can priorities of the poor women and men and boys and girls be heard and understood.

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Khosla, P and Pearl, R, 2003. *Untapped Connections – Gender, Water and Poverty: Key Issues, Government Commitments and Actions for Sustainable Development.* Available at: [http://www.wedo.org/files/untapped\\_eng.pdf](http://www.wedo.org/files/untapped_eng.pdf) (accessed on 29 June 2006). New York, NY: Women's Environment & Development Organization (WEDO).

Narayan, D., 2000. *Voices of the poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* Available at: <http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/voices/reports/canany/voll.pdf> (accessed on 29 June 2006). Washington, D.C., World Bank.

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Norton, A., 2005. *A Rough Guide to PPA's*, DFID, United Nations Development Programme, 2005. *International Co-operation at a Crossroads: Aid, Trade and Security in an Uneven World*, Human Development Report. Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05\\_overview.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05_overview.pdf)

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United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2005. *Human Development Report*. Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05\\_complete.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2005/pdf/HDR05_complete.pdf)

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## **Key Resources**

Abrams L, 1999. *Poverty, Water Supply and Sanitation Services*. Paper presented in a Regional workshop on Financing Community water supply and sanitation services. Available at: [http://www.thewaterpage.com/Documents/Poverty\\_and\\_sustainability.PDF](http://www.thewaterpage.com/Documents/Poverty_and_sustainability.PDF)

Asia Development Bank, 2004. *Water and Poverty: Fighting Poverty through Water Management*,

The publication outlines a framework for action linking poverty to water security and introducing related issues of governance, water quality issues, livelihood opportunities, capacity building and empowerment

Available at: <http://www.adb.org/doc/books/water>

Beall J , and N. Kanji, no date. *Urban Governance, Partnership and Poverty: Households Livelihoods and Urban Poverty*.

Butterworth, J.A, P.B. Moriarty and B. van Koppen, 2003. “Water, poverty, and productive uses of water at the household level: practical experiences, new research, and policy implications from innovative approaches to the provision and use of household water supplies.” In: *Proceedings of an International Symposium held in Pretoria, South Africa*, January 21-23, 2003.

Available at: <http://www.irc.nl/content/view/full/2715> (summary);

<http://www.irc.nl/themes/management/prodwat/> (full text) (only with password)

Dayal, R, C. van Wijk and N. Mukherjee, 2001. *Methodology for participatory assessments, with communities, institutions, and policy makers.*

This publication is suitable for those wishing to carry out participatory assessments that look at gender poverty and sustainability indicators within the context of water and sanitation.

Available at:

[http://www.schoolsanitation.org/Resources/Readings/global\\_metguideall.pdf](http://www.schoolsanitation.org/Resources/Readings/global_metguideall.pdf)

Federal Ministry of Economic Co-operation, 2001. *Poverty reduction- a global responsibility.* Available at: <http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-action-program-2015.pdf>

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Stamm-Berg, Helga, Henni Heise and Christophe Kohlmeyer, 2004. *Combating world hunger through sustainable agriculture.*

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Short C, undated. *Tackling Water Poverty.* Available at:

<http://www.ourplanet.com/imgversn/122/short.html>

IRC, 2004. *Linking water supply and poverty alleviation. The impact of women’s productive use of water and time on household economic and gender relations in Banaskantha District, Gujarat, India*

Available at:

[http://www.irc.nl/content/download/9405/140380/file/OP36\\_LWSPA.pdf](http://www.irc.nl/content/download/9405/140380/file/OP36_LWSPA.pdf)

Valfrey Bruno, Christophe Le Jallé and Pierre-Marie Grondin, undated. *Gender, Water and Poverty in West Africa: Move on to Action.*

Goyder H, R. Davies and W. Williamson, 1998. *Participatory Impact Assessment.* London: Action Aid.

This gives research methods and indicators for measuring the impact of poverty reduction. Four country studies from India, Bangladesh, Ghana, and Uganda are presented. The report describes the research process and summarises key findings. Incorporates gender perspectives and gives some interesting examples and analysis of gender differences. Raises some questions about the importance of quantitative indicators to communities and describes the use of meta-indicators.

Gross B, C. van Wijk, and N. Murkherjee, 2001. *Linking sustainability with demand, gender and Poverty: A study in community managed water supply projects in 15 countries*. Available at: [http://www.wsp.org/publications/global\\_plareport.pdf](http://www.wsp.org/publications/global_plareport.pdf)

Kabeer, Naila, 2003. *Gender Mainstreaming in Poverty Eradication and the Millennium Development Goals: A Handbook*.

The handbook is useful for policy makers and other stakeholders designing gender sensitive projects.

Available at: [www.idrc.ca/en/ev-28774-201-1-DO\\_TOPIC.html](http://www.idrc.ca/en/ev-28774-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html).

Saleth R.M, M. Samad, D. Molden, 2003. "Water poverty and gender: an overview of issues and policies", In *Water Policy* 5, pp. 538-398, International Water Institute

The paper examines the methodological and policy issues and suggests strategies for using water as a key instrument to address poverty and gender concerns.

Abstract available at: <http://www.iwaponline.com/wp/00505/wp005050385.htm>

Abu-Ata, Natahlie, 2005. *Water, Gender and Growth in the MENA region or the Cost of Gender Exclusion*, World Bank MENA Development Report on Water.

The purpose of this background paper is to provide an analytical framework and illustrative cases on the linkages between water, gender and poverty alleviation in the MENA region in preparation for the forthcoming flagship MENA development report on water. This paper will attempt to argue that it makes economic sense to make sure that women and female farmers and small-scale entrepreneurs have the same access to water as men and male farmers both for domestic and irrigation purposes, while at the same time highlighting the challenges and limits of doing so.

Nunan F, and D. Satterthwaite, 1999. *Urban governance, partnership and poverty: the urban environment*.

This is a working paper and there are a series of them looking at the urban environment. They focus on the effects of diseases, vectors and chemical hazards and are meant for policy makers and practitioners.

Roy, J. and B. Crow, 2004. "Gender Relations and Access to Water: What we want to know about social relations and women's time allocation," Centre for Global, International and Regional Studies, WP 2004-5, University of California, Santa Cruz

SIDA, 1997. *Economic Reform and Poverty: A Gender Analysis*.

The report contains discussion of the gender mainstreaming debates on economic reform and poverty. It highlights the importance of gender to economic reforms and poverty linkages. It concludes with a look at the implications for policy and practice.

Available at: <http://www.bridge.ids.ac.uk/reports/re50.pdf>

UNEP, 2002. *Water for the Poor*

This report presents a road map for delivering water services to the poor. It shows how business has begun providing an enabling environment needed to accelerate progress.

UNEP, 2002. *Where are the poor? Experience with the development and use of Poverty Maps*

This publication shows how international, national and local decision making bodies to direct investments can use road maps.

Available at: <http://pdf.wri.org/wherepoor.pdf>

United Nations, 2002. *A World Summit on Sustainable Development TYPE 2 PARTNERSHIPS*, UN, Johannesburg. Available at:

[www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/crps/a\\_conf199\\_crp5.pdf](http://www.johannesburgsummit.org/html/documents/crps/a_conf199_crp5.pdf)

IWMI, 2000. *From bucket to basin.: Managing Rivers Basins to Alleviate water Deprivation*. Available at: <http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/pubs/WWVisn/PovGender.htm>

IWMI, 2000. *Pedaling out of Poverty: Social Impact of a Manual Irrigation Technology in South Asia*

This research report offers an assessment of the social impact of the treadle pump technology for manual irrigation. The treadle pump can be a useful tool for poverty reduction.

Available at: <http://www.iwmi.cgiar.org/pubs/Pub045/Report45.pdf>

CTA, 1999. *Reducing poverty through agricultural sector strategies in Eastern and Southern Africa*

This is a workshop report that gives a summary of the strategies in Eastern and Southern Africa of the poverty reduction strategies.

Available at: <http://www.cta.int/pubs/redpov/report.pdf>

Upadhyay, B, 2003. *Water poverty and gender review of evidence from Nepal, India and South Africa*. Abstract available at:

<http://www.iwaponline.com/wp/00505/wp005050503.htm>

## **Spanish Language Resources**

Khosla, P, y Rebecca Pearl, 2003. *Conexiones claves. Genero, agua y pobreza.*, Organización de las Mujeres para el Medio Ambiente y Desarrollo (WEDO).

This paper presents an overview of the relationship between gender, poverty and water. The first section explores how, in every corner of the globe, women play a central role in managing water supply and distribution. It also examines how access to water and sanitation has implications for women's health and economic activities. Case studies highlight water projects and initiatives that have succeeded in elevating women's status.

Disponible en:

<http://www.aprchile.cl/pdfs/genero%20agua%20y%20pobreza%20en%20el%20mundo.pdf>

Soto, Betty y Virginia Chumacero, 2000. *Rol de la mujer en los sistemas de provisión de agua – Potosí – Bolivia*. Dirección: The World Bank.

*Esta publicación revela el papel de la mujer en las actividades que realiza en forma cotidiana, haciendo hincapié su relación con un sistema de agua potable, el uso y consumo del agua, su participación en la organización que administra el servicio, el aporte de su fuerza de trabajo, el nivel de decisión y su cosmovisión. Resultados obtenidos a través de un estudio que muestra datos estadísticos y un análisis de genero, como un aporte para estimular el debate en torno a la participación de la mujer en los sistemas de agua.*

Espejo, Norah y Ineke van der Pol, 1994. “*Mejor, cuando es de a dos*” – Guía de campo – La Haya Holanda, IRC - CINARA. Primera Edición,  
Guía de campo, orientada a promover y desarrollar la perspectiva de género en cada una de las fases del ciclo de un proyecto de agua y saneamiento. Presenta ideas, conceptos, listas de verificación, técnicas grupales, casos, cuadros, etc. Información producida en un Taller Latinoamericano.

Hermosa, Yenny Melgar, 2002. *Perspectiva de Género y Rol de la Mujer en la gestión de los recursos Hídricos en el Altiplano*.

Este esfuerzo editorial, cuenta con el apoyo del Centro Internacional de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo - IDRC, y presenta las ponencias y experiencias presentadas en el Encuentro Internacional: "Perspectiva de Género y Rol de la Mujer en la Gestión de los Recursos Hídricos en el Altiplano Latinoamericano", realizado en marzo del 2002 en la ciudad de Chucuito - Puno en el Sur del Perú.

## **French Language Resources**

Khosla, P. and Pearl, R., 2003. “*Connections inexploitées : genre, eau et pauvreté*” Women's Environment and Development Organization (WEDO), New York.

Donnant un aperçu de la relation entre genre, eau et pauvreté, ce rapport évoque le rôle central des femmes dans la gestion et la distribution de l'eau. Il examine comment l'accès à l'eau et à l'assainissement a des implications sur la santé, les activités économiques des femmes et le développement durable dans son ensemble.

Disponible au:

[http://www.wedo.org/files/untapped\\_eng.pdf](http://www.wedo.org/files/untapped_eng.pdf) [en anglais]

## **Web-sites**

### **UNDP, Human Development Reports**

This site has various human development reports with development index from around the globe. It is relevant for all levels within the development sphere and gives good reference statistics

<http://hdr.undp.org/>

### **Case studies**

The complete case studies are found in the annex of this resource guide

- India: Gender and Economic Benefits from Domestic Water Supply in Semi-Arid Areas
- Jordan: Rural Women Securing household water through installation of water cisterns in Rakin Village
- South Asia: Addressing Water and Poverty at the Grassroots: A Case Study of Area Water Partnerships and Women and Water Networks in South Asia