Chapter 1.3.7: Gender and Watershed Management

A. Why is Gender an Important Issue?

Women play a central role in the management and safeguarding of water resources. This pivotal role of women as managers of water resources and guardians of the living environment has seldom been reflected in institutional arrangements for the development and management of water resources.

An acceptance of this role requires positive policies to address women's specific needs and to equip and empower them to participate at all levels, including decision-making and implementation, in ways that have also been defined by them [1].

It is very often the case that women are overlooked by agriculture, forestry and watershed management programmes, because of the narrow view that is held by male farmers and professionals of the work that women do [1].

Nevertheless, evaluations of development interventions have shown that they are more successful if gender issues are considered and women participate in them. If a participatory approach is chosen, it is necessary to consider the diversity within communities and households, as well as gender relations [4].

B. What is Gender?

There are important differences between gender and sex (see also figure 2) and one must first of all realise that gender concerns both men and women, in relation to each other [4]. Sex on the other hand refers to the biological differences between men and women, which are universal and do not change. Gender therefore concerns itself with social attributes that are learned when growing up as a member of a particular community. Because these attributes are learned behaviour, they are able to change – as they do, and which also explains why they vary between different cultures and ethnic groups [6].

Box 1: Gender is defined as the socially and culturally constructed differences (as opposed to biological differences) between men and women. Gender divisions are learned behaviour and these change over time, as circumstances force communities to adapt to situations by changing gender roles [4].

More specifically, gender refers to the socially designated attributes, roles, activities, responsibilities and needs of men and women in a given society at a given time, and also those given as a member of a specific community within that society. Women and men's
gender identity determines how they are perceived and how they are expected to think and act. Gender is also one of the variables used in the distribution of privilege, prestige, power, as well as various social and economic resources [5]. Some gender issues and related aspects as found in the Lower Mekong Basin (LMB) are summarised in a case study [1].

Figure 2: Overview of the Differences between Sex and Gender [6]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biological</td>
<td>Born with and therefore cannot be changed</td>
<td>Not born with and therefore can change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
<td>Only women can give birth</td>
<td>Examples: Women and men can cook and also both can take care of children and the elderly</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gender relations are concerned with the way in which power is distributed between the sexes. They define the ways in which responsibilities and claims are allocated. Additionally they are dynamic and reflect the different positions and roles that men and woman assume in a society.

These positions and roles in turn determine men's and women's own specific perspectives, knowledge and needs ([4], [6]). Gender relations encompass links of co-operation, connection and mutual support but also of conflict, separation, and competition, as well as difference and inequality.

There are several myths which prevent women from getting actively involved and in representing themselves in development programmes, training and extension activities, as well as farmers' organisations, among others. The following five myths have the tendency to force women into a passive role [4]:

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1 See also: CS: Gender Issues in the Lower Mekong Basin [1.3.7]
Women only do domestic work: There is an assumption that women do not contribute significantly to household income, agriculture, forestry or watershed management. The belief is that they are confined to household chores and child care. Their activities related to agriculture, forestry or watershed management are either overlooked or classified as domestic work because they often deal with activities associated with subsistence agriculture. Women are often disregarded as they are not paid or underpaid for their work because most of their produce is for home consumption with a little or no surplus for the market. Additionally professionals are often unaware of the full extent and the dimensions to which women contribute towards agriculture, forestry and other natural resource management activities.

Each member of the family shares the benefits equally: This myth is based on the assumption that households are homogenous units in which altruistic decision-making takes place. The presumption is inaccurate as girls are often deprived of education, nutritious food and engage in hard labour, whereas boys tend to be more privileged. Numerous case studies have shown that income earned by men is associated with consumption, whereas women tend to spend it on the family.

Technology will automatically benefit both men and women equally: Information and technology is often targeted at men and not at women. Technological information delivered through extension services is often channelled to wealthy male farmers and women are often not regarded as clients by extension agents. Women are not involved in training activities or are unable to attend because of time constraints. Furthermore the actual technology is often designed for men, even if the work is traditionally done by women. The technological requirements of women may be different because they have different responsibilities in the household and the management of natural resources.

Women’s voices will be heard through their male relatives: Often male relatives serve as an intermediary with the outside world. When men participate in formal organisations, in which women are often not present, it is assumed than that they will voice their wife’s or daughter’s opinions. However, as men and women are assigned different tasks, men may not have the knowledge to be able to make certain decisions on behalf of women or be able to voice their opinions. It is simply not realistic to expect men to be able to make decisions about women’s tasks of which they have little knowledge. There is also no guarantee that women’s needs will be considered and given priority by men.

Women are incompetent at certain activities: Case studies have shown for instance that husbands consider their wives to be ignorant because they are illiterate. It is also believed that only men are competent in meetings, at public speaking, and in dealing with land related matters. Another argument is that women are too shy to attend training sessions. In order to change the mentality that the inequities suffered by women are not the result of biological but social reasons will require a struggle and a challenge of the notions related to men’s and women’s roles and capabilities.
C. Gender Analysis

Women should be equal and active partners in watershed management. Both women and men have valuable knowledge, which should be incorporated into the process in order to ensure sustainability. Watershed management will not be successful, if gender aspects are not given adequate consideration [4].

Gender issues can be analysed and integrated into watershed management through participatory approaches that ensure that women’s voices are heard and their concerns, knowledge and needs are considered and addressed.

As gender differs by culture, it cannot be predetermined and therefore needs to firstly be analysed. Gender analysis tools have been developed, that can help to identify the different roles, tasks and responsibilities of men and women, and some of these are participatory tools. They are a part of participatory rural appraisal (PRA) techniques and focus on the following questions [2]:

- **Related to control over resources**: Who has control over and access to resources such as education, and authority over knowledge, time and energy? What implications does this have for those with restricted access? What gender specific differences exist in these contexts?
- **Related to activities**: Who performs certain activities, such as those for example involved in land use? How clearly defined is the division of labour?
- **Related to benefits**: Who profits from different resource management activities? How are the profits distributed and utilised?

Gender Analysis can be divided into the following three main categories, each of which uses several practical PRA tools [6]:

- **The development context**: In order to learn about the environmental, social and economic factors that either support or constrain development in a community. Selected tools include resource maps, transects, social maps, trend lines and Venn diagrams.

- **Livelihood analysis**: In order to learn about community activities and resources that are important for both women and men. Selected tools include farming system diagrams, benefit flow charts, daily activity calendars, seasonal calendars, resource picture cards, as well as income and expenditure matrices.

- **Stakeholders’ priorities for development**: In order to plan development activities that are based on the priorities of women as well as those of men. Selected tools include

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2 See also: Chapter 1.1.7: Methods and Instruments for Watershed Management

3 See also: TA: Technical Description of Selected Participatory Techniques [1.1.7]
D. Gender Mainstreaming in Development and Watershed Management

A gender analysis increases one’s knowledge about gender roles as well as the inequalities that exist, but it will not automatically bring about change. Therefore, the **results of a gender analysis** should be used to trigger and promote the necessary changes in relation to planning, the setting of priorities, the choice of methods and the implementation of activities [6].

It is important to utilise the results of the gender analysis during all stages of watershed management. Related efforts should **create a gender perspective and develop gender responsive policies and activities**, rather than just adding separate activities for women as a target group. The focus should be on making gender equality an objective.

**Box 2: Gender equality** means that women and men have an equal status despite their biological differences, by ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life as well as education, health and employment [5].

In the context of international human rights, the legal concept of gender equality is described in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (1948), as well as in the **United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women** (1979) [7]. It came into force on the 3rd of September, 1981 and has, as of March 2004, 176 states as parties [6]. Gender equality is not only a “women’s issue” but rather an issue that concerns all of society and has implications for men as well as women. Therefore, more men need to be engaged in the pursuit of solutions, as they would be able to do for example in their roles as officials and extension workers [6].

The integration of gender issues and the achievement of gender equality in watershed management can be accomplished through gender mainstreaming.

**Box 3: Gender mainstreaming** is the reorganisation, development and evaluation of work so that the responsible individuals incorporate a gender equality perspective in all activities and policies, at all levels and stages, as well as in the formulation of policy. In the case of watershed management for example, a gender equality perspective is made part of the mainstream watershed management process [6].

Gender mainstreaming makes use of the **gender and development approach**, which is an approach to development work that specifically looks at the unequal relations between the advantaged and the disadvantaged and within this examines the additional inequities that women face. The approach focuses on gender equality as an objective, rather than women as a target group. The main objectives of this approach are to strengthen the effectiveness of development work in improving the situation of both women and men, and thereby achieving progress towards gender equality. Gender and development is not an entirely new approach. It emerged as an alternative to the older women in development

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4 See: **TA: General Description and Application of Selected Participatory Techniques [1.1.7]**
approach, which only focused on women, and called for their integration into development as producers and workers. It builds on the efforts and experience that has been gained over the last three decades in development work in order to understand and improve the position of women and disadvantaged groups in society. The gender and development approach is marked by [6]:

- A shift in perception of the problem in relation to gender equality
- A recognition that gender equality is integral to development goals
- A realisation that previous approaches were not resulting in any real change in the position of women and improving gender equality

Table 1 provides a comparison of the more recent gender and development approach and the older approaches.

**Table 1: Comparison of Approaches [6]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Older Approaches</th>
<th>Gender and Development Approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Analysis:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women are left out and so they lack:</td>
<td>Social structures and processes recreate inequalities between women and men in regard to:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Education</td>
<td>• Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Training</td>
<td>• Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Credit</td>
<td>• Decision-making.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Self-esteem</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem:</strong> Women</td>
<td><strong>Problem:</strong> Inequality between women and men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach:</strong> Women must change the way they are in order to be integrated into development.</td>
<td><strong>Approach:</strong> Society and institutions must change their attitudes and practices in support of equal choices and opportunities for women and men.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The obstacles to gender mainstreaming and possibilities of overcoming these obstacles have been summarised in table 2.

**Table 2: Obstacles to Gender Mainstreaming and Possible Solutions [4]**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacles</th>
<th>Possible Solutions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Demonstrate faith in women’s capabilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Recognise women farmers as valid contributors</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Avoid linguistic and visual biases as well as gender stereotyping</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Gradually introduce changes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Examine the perception of women and men in one’s own agency, such as for example through a self-audit</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Get support from men, partners, colleagues, policymakers and planners etc.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>A lack of time due to the heavy work burden, as the housework is not shared</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Minimise conflicts between women’s multiple responsibilities (economic, household, community and conservation)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Introduce labour saving measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Introduce flexible school hours, and reduce the demand for girls’ labour, so that girls can receive an education</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Develop and provide appropriate technology</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obstacles</td>
<td>Possible Solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Lack of access to resources, capital and institutes** | • Increase women's economic independence  
• Provide women with access to resources  
• Provide technical inputs to men and women  
• Mobilise women’s collective group action in order to enhance their bargaining power with agencies which have access to resources and politics  
• Integrate women into these agencies  
• Receive support from established institutions  
• Include measures which address both practical and strategic gender needs  
• Allocate adequate human and material resources  
• Provide access to credit by providing linkages with lending institutes |
| **Lack of education**                          | • Pay explicit attention to awareness raising and capacity building activities to learn new analytical skills and increase awareness  
• Improve literacy, which also includes accounting  
• Introduce practical adult education |
| **Legal aspects**                              | • Create better provision of land rights for women  
• Provide equal pay so that pay is based on the quantity of work and not gender  
• Recognise customary laws which are supportive of women |
| **Policy and Planning: women are absent from fora where decisions are made, and are therefore powerless** | • Facilitate women to identify and prioritise their interests and needs  
• Mobilise women around self-defined concerns and priorities, as well as participation in the establishment of needs, priorities and opportunities  
• Integrate women’s needs and priorities into organisational agendas  
• Plan a strategic gender process, as well as specific measures and organisational arrangements to promote gender equality  
• Apply a multi-disciplinary and phased approach, as well as strategies with linked components to address the multi-faceted needs of women (changing attitudes and norms and capacity building requires process with gradual phases)  
• Provide a forum in which women can confront their own problems  
• Create a climate for staff to address gender issues  
• Employ female staff in policy and planning institutions, as well as in watershed management programmes |

Further information on gender mainstreaming and the gender and development approach can be found in the highly recommended *Gender Strategy* and *Gender and Development Field Guide* of the Lao Swedish Forestry Programme ([5], [6]).
References and Sources for Further Reading


