

Easier to say, harder to do – gender, equity and water

By Sarah House

Abstract

Multi-layered challenges face those working in water and development who try to consider gender and equity issues in their work, at both programme and organisational levels.

This paper particularly looks at the impacts of the organisations themselves and the people within them, highlighting the wide ranging views on the subject of gender and equity, the impact of lack of policies and strategies and the limitations of staff capacities and of gender advocates themselves. The paper highlights the complexities of the subjects of gender and equity and the need for them to be understood within each context specific environment. It also reinforces the need for commitment and confidence building and skill development over substantial periods of time, including the development of appropriate methodologies for use in the field. A number of ways forward are identified within the debates.

Experiences are written from the perspective of the work of an International NGO and partners in northern Tanzania¹. It is posed that considering gender and equity is easier to say but much harder to do and that despite several decades of discussion and debate internationally on the issues, there is still a need for substantial effort, commitment and resources for policy and practice to develop into real changes on the ground.

Introduction

The importance of considering gender in water projects has been openly talked about at international fora since the 1970s and national domestic water supply and water resource policies have increasingly started to incorporate considerations of gender issues, although to differing degrees and adopting varying approaches (GWA, 2003). Although it would have been hoped that a greater impact would have been made on policies world-wide after such a time frame, it is also disappointing to notice that the policy and practice at organisational and project levels in international NGOs and organisations working in the water sector, also still remains erratic and in some cases still manages to ignore the considerations altogether. This paper attempts to highlight some of these problems and some of the persisting barriers which help to keep the consideration of gender and equity outside of the mainstream of policy and practice.

Many of the experiences in this paper relate to practical work undertaken on gender and equity in the KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid Kiteto Water, Hygiene and Sanitation Programme in northern Tanzania during the period 1999-2002 and within WaterAid, Tanzania and within WaterAid as an international organisation. Within the Kiteto programme equity was in particular considered between people from different ethnic groups who had differing livelihood bases of agriculture, pastoralism and hunter-gathering.

It should be noted that it is the author's view that WaterAid is a thinking and learning INGO which is open to new ideas and is responsive to learning from its partners and programmes. It also has numerous successful projects and has had wide impact within its programme areas around the world. If this is the case, then the difficulties faced in considering gender and equity within such an organisation can only put into perspective the challenges which must be faced in getting less reflective organisations, or established agencies or institutions, to practically mainstream gender into their policies and programmes.

¹ The views expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily of WaterAid as an organisation.

Experiences showed in WaterAid that the importance of considering gender and equity in water, hygiene and sanitation projects was not always understood, or agreed. But experiences also showed that when the opportunity was available to progress on gender and equity there were still many challenges to be faced. This paper attempts to highlight some of these experiences to give a clearer picture of the range of challenges when trying to turn internationally and nationally agreed policies and agreements into working realities.

Getting debates started

Getting started and views on the consideration of gender

The consideration of gender in projects still causes significant debate and differences of opinion. There seem to be differing feelings and understanding about what considering gender means and whether or not we should be considering it. Views range from *'it's a western / feminist agenda not suitable for use in the south'*, to *'if we get some women on the water committees and digging trenches then we've succeeded'*, to *'if women are on water committees then they don't speak and their opinion is ignored, so what is the point?'*, through to *'it means working to change the structure and power relations of society so that men and women are on equal footings, which means that you can't do water projects on their own, but they should be supported by other activities such as literacy and income generating activities which will help in the strategic empowerment of women'*.

On arriving in the first village on taking up post in Kiteto, we sat down with a number of village members and our [usually] all male team and had a meeting essentially between the male village chairman and the programme and partner staff. The programme had been working in this village for over two years. On questioning why there were no women at the meeting and how we could go ahead with a meeting without them, a management level staff member replied 'well when women do come they don't speak, so what is the point?'

(House, S, 1999, Kiteto, Tanzania)

In Kiteto, WaterAid were behind our local partners in our interest, understanding and desire to consider gender in our work. Both KINNAPA, the local pastoralist NGO and the Kiteto District Council (KDC) were making various efforts to look at themselves and their non-WaterAid work to see how they could better consider women as well as men and empower women in this process. Due to the WaterAid, Kiteto's staff team's leadership's lack of interest in the area, this had not however translated into consideration within the WaterAid partnership programme. This clearly highlighted how individual opinions and preferences are still able to influence practice within organisations and programmes.

Views on vulnerability and equity also differ. It can be considered that as we work in a participatory way, by default this includes everyone in the community. Whether it is an international or local external agency's role, to work with communities to identify who is the most vulnerable so that they can be targeted with subsidy or to ensure that their needs are met, is also sometimes debated.

'Some view a gender-neutral participatory approach with pride, as non-intrusive and culturally sensitive'

'Yet in many cases, where participation has been pursued something is going wrong. Despite the stated intentions of social inclusion, it has become clear that many participatory development initiatives do not deal well with the complexity of community differences, including age, economic, religious, caste, ethnic and, in particular gender. Looking back it is apparent that 'community' has often been viewed naively, or in practice dealt with, as a harmonious and internally equitable collective. Too often there has been an inadequate understanding of the internal dynamics and differences that are so crucial to positive outcomes. This mythical notion of community cohesion continues to permeate much participatory work, hiding a bias that favours the opinions and priorities of those with more power and the ability to voice themselves publicly'

(Guijit and Shah, 1998).

But at the other end of the scale other views include that considering vulnerability should be core to everything that we do:

In Kiteto, although trying to work our way through the myriad of complex relationships and sensitivities so as to be able to openly debate the pastoralist-agriculturalist issue, we were repeatedly pushed by a senior manager of one of our partners that we should be doing more in relation to understanding and responding to issues of vulnerability, particularly in relation to the difficulties faced by pastoralists and small peasant farmers in a district where land and water conflicts were becoming more commonplace.

(House, S, 1999 onwards, Kiteto, Tanzania)

With such wide ranging views and no formal organisational policy committing programmes to consider gender, equity or vulnerability, starting and continuing to work on these areas within country and sub-country programmes seemed to be relatively up to individuals own interests and commitment. In WaterAid's case, usually there was enough support in the line management chain to allow programmes to take the work as far as the staff and partners wanted to in their own work. But this also meant that where there was limited interest that there was also limited pressure to ensure effective consideration.

It was also clear that the process of learning was time consuming and that this process could have easily been derailed at points of staff changeover, or where the pressures of the day-to-day work became too demanding. Limitations in time for the project cycle for water, hygiene and sanitation programmes also could have been a constraint. However, in the KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid programme, the programme was blessed with varying degrees of open-minded line management and organisational attitude that allowed appropriate time to be taken for learning and responding to locally identified issues. This allowed it to progress in its gender and equity work, perhaps further than other programmes which had shorter project time-frames.

Organisational change and gender activists

In terms of trying to promote gender within the organisation and internationally, both in relation to itself and in its policies for its programme work, the debates faced similar barriers. Within international organisations, it is possibly more difficult to see and respond to gender and equity internally than within the projects settings. In the projects, gender differences appear starker due to the often total absence of women, but the difference is probably also related to a different power relationship when dealing with the internal workings of an international organisation, than working on project level issues, with people who want your support and help in improving their water, hygiene or sanitation situations.

Gender activists also have their own limitations. As the gender debate often provokes heated discussion, there can be a lack of interest in becoming the champion or person who is seen to be pushing forward the debate. Becoming this person can also often mean receiving the negativity which appears to be integral to the raising of the subject.

'Talking about gender inevitably reminds us at some level of our own – usually uneasy – position on the gendered power scale and the double binds involved in analysing that position and acting accordingly. We need to realise that extreme reactions of 'political correctness' or defensive dismissal of gender issues highlight emotional risk to which people feel exposed when discussing power relations of which they are a part'

(p49, 1999, MacDonald et al)

Without a person or team with organisational responsibilities to ensure the consideration of gender and equity throughout the organisation, movement for change can become vulnerable or become lost.

It also seems that those who are the most vocal in promoting gender equity are commonly the most strong headed, possibly those who have faced gender or equity related issues themselves in the past and hence may be the reason for their heightened empathy with the subject. Although this is probably necessary to get the debate rolling in the face of sometimes

quite difficult resistance, it can also lead to differences of opinion on views towards their work on gender between the activists themselves and there can then be a risk of self-implosion and even withdrawal from the debates. For further discussion, MacDonald et al (1999, pp35-54) identify the various types of change agents in the field of gender and provides interesting analysis and insights into gender dynamics within donor organisations themselves.

In terms of an international organisation often the senior and middle management are male and female staff the more junior. In WaterAid it often tended to be female staff [although not always] who started debates about the need to consider gender and then later the more enlightened male staff joined as supporters and activists. However, due to the gendered divisions of power within organisations, if the female staff are unable to express their views and their male line managers are not in agreement with the issue, this can become a barrier to progressing with the gender issue.

It was obvious through the debates and processes in WaterAid in Tanzania that a lot of the interest and drive for pushing the gender debate forward was coming from the national female senior field staff and partner staff who were in positions just below management level. But to be able to move forward on the subject of gender, commitment and approval was also required from management level. In the case of WaterAid in Tanzania, the situation where a few management level male staff disagreed with the issue of considering gender could have derailed the process which a national female senior field level staff member had opened up through her efforts. Had there not also been other management team members keen to support her and to ensure that the debate was kept on the table; her efforts may have been in vain. It was very interesting sitting in-between two national female senior field staff members as the debate re not considering gender was ensuing between a couple of the male management staff. Whispers indicating how much the female staff disagreed with the debate were numerous, but it was also obvious that some of the female staff members felt unable to challenge their line managers in this open forum.

(House, S, 1999, Dodoma, Tanzania)

Specific efforts to re-dress the balance of male and female staff in WaterAid Tanzania, at all levels were made. These included ensuring there were always men and women on interview panels, providing additional funds for the employment of junior female field staff from marginalised ethnic groups in the process of developing further certain skill areas, provision of additional resources for capacity building etc. This moved the situation somewhat forward but limitations were still found, including in recruitment opportunities for middle and senior management positions with few women applicants still applying for posts, limiting the selection pool.

Getting the debates started and the commitment to the learning and implementation process of considering gender and equity is a difficult road full of pit-falls. Getting to the point where work can begin both within programmes and organisations seemed from the field, that under these circumstances it was quite an achievement in itself.

Understanding the issues

Limited guidance on how to move forward

Finding guidance on how to consider gender and equity in all aspects of programmes activities on a daily basis is not that easy. On investigation advice can be found mainly for the initial analysis stages of power relations in publications such as Slocum et al (1995) and these are useful resources. But it is not so easy to find examples and guidance of how programmes and projects can actually integrate considerations of gender and equity into their everyday work. What do you actually do when only men turn up the meetings? How should you react when women are seen to be sitting all day to wait for water until the cattle have finished drinking? What should you do when the men or representatives of a majority ethnic group in a community take over decision making and the voice of the minority or less powerful is dismissed? Analysis by those interested in the gender issue which limits itself to criticism that

organisations working in water are not doing things correctly, can help to keep gender on the agenda, which is in itself positive contribution, but may not really help in taking the work in programmes and projects forward. In terms of useful publications with practical examples of what can be done, there are some exceptions. These include the Asian and African field guides developed by the IRC (1994a and b) which use clear case studies and examples of what can be done, and some upcoming publications by Reed (Ed.) (draft 2002) which are aiming to make gender more accessible to technical personnel. Other good ideas can be found elsewhere such as in Regmi, S. C. and Fawcett, B (1999) and in other occasional analyses and papers. However, in terms of helping the implementers to change their work practices the information is difficult to access so that it can be used in a practical way

Understanding context specific environments

To be able to effectively incorporate the gender and equity issue into programmes and projects, the first steps are to identify what may be the types of difficulties and issues to be faced. Then it is to look and learn in the communities and environments in which a programme or project is working. Undertaking basic field level research to highlight the power and vulnerability issues could easily be incorporated into standard processes when first working with communities. But at present many PRAs as undertaken, only touch on such issues in a superficial way. Having women on the village PRA team may in itself be taken as adequate evidence that women's views have been incorporated into the process. But this paper poses that without significant effort this is rarely the case.

'In the village of Amei in Kiteto, a few women were included in the original village PRA team. However it appears that no explicit effort was made to look at power relations or issues related to access, resources and decision making and how the project should respond. After the project had progressed through to rehabilitation of the borehole system, whilst in the village for some finishing off of construction work, it was observed that the women were sitting for most of the day before they could get water. On questioning it was found out that the system developed which involved men paying for diesel to pump water for their cattle and women being able to get water free, was not as positive a system for women as it seemed on first observation. Because the men were paying for the water for their cattle some were reluctant to allow women to take the water before their cattle had drunk. This is also common practice at traditional wells in the district where women have to get out of the well and wait until the cattle have drunk, even if this means waiting for a large proportion of the day before they can also collect water. The fact that the team were not aware of this when they worked with the men and women of Amei to set up the system, or some were aware of it coming from the same cultural background, but did not think it was a relevant issue for the project, showed a serious weakness on the part of the project team and project process',

(House, S, 2000, Kiteto, Tanzania)

Working with gender and equity requires a thorough understanding of the context specific environments in which they are being considered. The issue noted above for the pastoralist community of Amei is not the same issue, for example, as would be found in some of the agricultural based communities who also live in Kiteto. Learning what the issues are takes time, good questioning and listening skills and continual observation. Gender and equity are dynamic concepts and so the learning needs to start from the initial contacts with communities and should continue through to the end of the project.

Complexity

Gender and equity are also complex subjects. Gender issues are intertwined with issues of ethnicity, age, culture, tradition, wealth and other. It was interesting working in an area where there were stark differences in tradition / culture and gender. In Kiteto there are three main types of communities, classified according to the basis of their major livelihood: pastoralism, agriculture and hunter-gathering. Due to many factors such as pressure on land for farming, mobility, pastoralists lack of take up of formal education leading to difficulties in engaging in national policy debates, and prejudice against non-farming ways of life leading to them being seen as inferior, the pastoralists, and even more so, the hunter-gatherer communities had

become marginalised. Conflicts were becoming more common place as more land was changing from pasture land to farm land. However, whilst trying to work with the pastoralists in particular, and helping them to have more of a voice in discussions with the farming communities and their representatives, it was obvious that the division of marginalised and / or vulnerable was not clear cut. Within pastoralist society there were some very rich pastoralists and there were very poor pastoralists, just as in farming communities there were rich and poor farmers. Rich pastoralists with large cattle herds wielded significant power in their communities and access and control issues over new projects were complicated by this power. Within both there were significant gender issues with women from most ethnic groups in both pastoralist and farming communities having very little if any ownership or control of household resources, even of produce from land they may have farmed (Ngurumwa et al, 2001). Land take over for large farms was not just by rich people from farming backgrounds, but also by rich people from pastoralist backgrounds.

Trying to ensure that the most vulnerable and marginalised had a voice in project activities in practice sometimes felt like holding a very delicate balance, trying to discuss issues related to marginalisation and power, without further developing prejudices or marginalisation of, or against, any group.

Developing methodologies and skills and commitment of programme and field staff

Training

Working on gender and equity in water projects, usually requires some basic training for the staff so that they have a grounding on what the types of issues are and to help them to be able to see through gender aware eyes in their work. In Kiteto the route to training came through an acknowledgement that there were problems, but that as a programme team we didn't know how to respond to them. A few of the team who were already reasonably gender aware undertook some field based research in a number of villages. The findings of this research were then used as a starting point from where the field team members were encouraged to participate in awareness raising workshops. It was obvious during these workshops that there was a range of understanding on what gender was and a tendency for gender discussions in workshops to often cover the same ground was sometimes disillusioning. How many times are we going to discuss and agree that the important issue is that gender is about power relations between men and women and the way they interact and not just about women? This often being said with a finality that would imply that all would be sorted, as long as we understood this fact? Although important to get the basic concepts of the issues, moving on from the theories to getting down to the practical ways we could respond and the methodologies on the ground felt as though it was quite a significant step.

Developing methodologies

To be able to respond to the issues in the field, the field team had to develop its own practical methodologies as to how to work. These included actions such as: ensuring that the teams communicated with all key groups in communities separately about project activities where there was evidence of exclusion; supporting open discussions over difficult issues between representatives of minority and majority groups; postponing meetings where women were not present or in a severe minority, discussing openly why and investigating with women why they had not attended; openly congratulating / praising women in their ideas in open forum to build confidence; supporting representation of women as well as men in the more powerful committee roles and providing training; encouraging the men and women community representatives to openly monitor the participation of the various key groups in the community; including discussions on gender and equity aspects in all community trainings and continually raising and discussing issues in meetings; including male and female elders from the range of groups within the communities concerned in key decision making processes particularly over key sensitive issues; and numerous others (KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid, Kiteto, 2002).

After a period of time the programme also documented the methodologies that had been identified, agreed which were being used and which were not, as well as

evaluating their effectiveness and deciding which should be continued. The methodologies were discussed using verbal case studies to highlight where the different methodologies had been used and what had resulted. For wider organisational learning the outcomes of these discussions were also shared with other programmes.

Personal values and commitment

Learning about gender and equity is not the same as learning about, for example, a technical subject. Our views on the concepts and reasoning behind considering gender and equity are influenced by our own positions in society, our traditions and our cultures in a way that the technical design of a pipeline usually isn't. This means that basic understanding and commitment to the work will vary person to person. Here is where it is clear that there is a particular value in facilitating and encouraging field staff to discuss their opinions and experiences openly between themselves. And the multiple effect of, for example, a male pastoralist member of staff being a committed gender advocate, can be much more valuable than an international staff member being the same. The encouragement of continued discussion on the gender issue, particularly between the field team members and with the open support of the partnerships management, seemed to have a significant effect on the teams' capacity and confidence.

As gender and equity are such complex subjects, another strategy which contributed to them being effectively considered throughout the programmes work, was to keep ensuring that they were on the agenda. This was through specific opportunities for reflection and sharing such as in workshops targeted at these particular issues, or making sure that the subjects were continually considered during other activities such as meetings, planning events (ref: Kiteto Partnership Strategy Planning document, Mmanda et al, 2002), through general discussions, further research, or through field work.

Interest in the subject and ownership of the work that the programme was undertaking on gender and equity took a while to get moving. However, after some time the fact that the team was trying hard to respond to gender and equity in the field started to become an area of a pride for the field team members and this helped to develop interest and confidence further.

One example of the sharing of experiences occurred through a competition set up for the field team members to document their experiences as case studies. Although most field staff had never written a case study before, most staff from both partner organisations, KINNAPA and KDC, and WaterAid, energetically submitted them. The case studies were often enlightening and new ideas as well as problems were once again shared across the group, as shown in the following extracts:

'When I was discussing this issue directly with women right at the meeting, so that one could stand up and give the answers to the questions I posed to them, one man told me that it is not possible for a woman to stand in front of a men's gathering. This is because, according to their beliefs and traditions, if that will happen, then all men at that meeting will die'

'After that sentence I felt very uncomfortable and subordinated and the same to all women who were there. After that situation I started mobilising the community about women's rights, their importance in development projects and donors views on gender aspects...'

'After that [on the third day] I went to the meeting to explain such a situation to the gathering and to make sure that we insisted on a sustainable way and the importance of women's participation and contribution towards the public meetings. This was whilst standing up and flushing out the men's minds about the wrong concept of dying while women stand up in front of them during meetings. I did this by asking them "who died last night as the result of women standing in front of them yesterday"?'

(Paulina Ngurumwa in KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid, Kiteto 2002)

'As a facilitation team we asked the meeting to split into two groups of men and women separately. Our aim was to give more chance and freer opportunity to women to discuss and give suggestions and on top of that to make their own decisions on how to solve the problems. In the groups,

female TUWI members facilitated the women's group and the male TUWI members went to the men's group. We spent almost one hour to facilitate discussions in the groups. Oh, it was very interesting to see how women were very active to talk in their group. And they made very strong decisions for improvement of the scheme management'

'In fact from the decisions made by the women's group, when presented to the general meeting with men, they helped very much to prepare basic contents of the project management scheme. In the general meeting the team gave a chance to a women's representative to make feedback. She looked very confident. And in a very great extent, men in the meeting agreed with the decisions that were made by women. So instead of men seeing that the decisions were made by the individual woman who was presenting, they respected the decisions as a group decision'.

(Saad Makwali in KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid, Kiteto, 2002)

Developing policies, strategies and commitment statements

In WaterAid Tanzania the inclusion of a statement in the WaterAid Country Strategy happened after some time of working on gender across the programmes (of which the Kiteto programme was one of four) and investigating the issues. This was a significant step forward in the work of gender and vulnerability in the Country Programme.

'WaterAid and its partners have already committed themselves to incorporating gender into all stages of the project cycle. We need to continue to develop strategies and monitoring tools that ensure the commitment is translated into real benefits for women and children. We also need to ensure that our commitment to sustainable development by means of empowering of the most vulnerable is constant, unwavering and solid'

(WaterAid, Tanzania Country Strategy, 2001)

In Kiteto, the partnership also developed its own gender and equity commitment statement which was signed by the representatives of the three organisations. Within this commitment statement it noted what we as a programme believe in relation to gender and equity, the limitations of what we would be able to do, and then what we committed to the best of our ability to do. One example from each of these three sections is shown below:

'We believe that...due to current power relations, that some groups participate easier than others, such as men, the more wealthy, and educated and that other groups, such as women, elderly, the very poor, the disabled and those in minority situations, will need additional support and encouragement to be able to participate'.

'But we also understand that... the communities in which we work are very large [1,000 – 20,000 people] and that not every person will be able to participate in the day to day decision making and activities in the project. But key decisions should be facilitated through the General Assemblies, which allow people some access to decision making. However, broad representation in the project is a key step towards enhancing solidarity and the ownership across the social groups'.

'In response to these beliefs the programme teams commit, to the best of their ability to try to...ask questions when working in the villages and seeing that certain groups are not being involved, as to why they are not and try to find out why. To find out whether it is by their choice, by their priorities, or by exclusion, or lack of information, or other'.

(KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid, Kiteto Gender and Equity Commitment Statement, 2002)

Although it was a useful process to have worked through as a programme the issues relating to gender and equity ourselves before coming up with the programme commitment statement,

it was interesting to note the sigh of relief that one field worker made when the commitment statement was signed by the programme's management. She noted that now the team could feel confident in their work on gender and equity in the villages as they knew that they had the management's backing. This once again highlighted the vulnerability of the consideration of gender and equity when organisations have not engrained their commitment to this in their policies and strategies.

At this point in time WaterAid as an INGO still does not have an organisational policy on gender or equity. Within its latest five year strategy there were a few commitments included on maximising benefits for women and children and using gender analysis and in also seeking a fair gender balance in its decision-making processes. But it has only really just started to make progress on its thinking organisation-wide and there is still some way to go (WaterAid, 2000). But the developments over the past few years have been a start. The skill will be in trying to ensure that the learning is not lost and is utilised through development into organisational wide policies and strategies which are then implemented, monitored and evaluated for further development.

Successes and weaknesses in Kiteto and the communities' views

In terms of ensuring that women, men, and people from all livelihood backgrounds and from across the social groups could participate in the project, it was clear that after a period of three years that some significant progress had been made.

'When I joined the team in the year 2001 and participated in the different activities, I realised that the Njoro community had changed a lot [Tuke had been involved in Njoro previously in 1994 and subsequent years]. It is also the only village of the programme with a pump attendant who is a woman, and also women who are members of the water committee meetings and in project activities they are now participating fully and contribute their ideas openly etc. So I can now conclude by saying that women in Njoro are recognised and respected and they have confidence too'. (Gabrielle ole Tuke in KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid, 2002)

However, with any process which involves a form of social transformation, change does not happen overnight and strong views are still held on the various sides in the communities in which we worked.

'Some community members are saying that to involve women is the way of under-grading men' (Hassan Mohamed in KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid, 2002)

Views were specifically asked of a group of men and women in Njoro village in 2002, on aspects of the project and of the way the team worked on gender in the water project. In this village in 1999, meetings were nearly all held with only men from the majority agricultural side of the community. By 2002, the pastoralist minority and the women were playing an increasing role and it was noted that sometimes the women now even appeared stronger than the men. A selection of the range of views expressed follows here (KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid, Kiteto, 2002):

'I am a wife, but today I am singing and dancing in front of people and I feel proud [this lady lead one of the choirs which sang and danced during the days celebration]' (woman)

'The work that TUWI² / the programme has been doing on gender has been very influential to our general lives as well – it has helped [in the relationships] in our homes'. (man)

'There are two levels of understanding in the village – that of the people here who are mainly the leadership who now have a good understanding of the issues and are now very committed, and then that of the general community where gender is still a problem – even in the celebration today some men

² TUWI was the KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid, Kiteto partnership's district community mobilisation team made up of staff from all three organisations.

would not let their wives attend the celebration and they would have to remain at home' (man)

'You should tell them that you should continue to facilitate women and men to be able to work together. I would like to give my personal experience. I am a Water Committee member and early on for a training session my husband would not allow me to attend the training. After he received education on gender he now allows me to go for training. My husband even cooked for my children when I went to a training'. (woman)

'There should be no separate work for men and women when distributing work. If someone says this to you [that women have too much work already and so they shouldn't be involved] then tell them that we said that you should continue working as you are with gender – and tell them not to take us backwards' (woman).

The programme did not focus much on involving the youth, elderly or disabled although this was changing near the end of 2002, particularly with the increased involvement of male and female elders in some of the communities. But the very poorest will always still be the hardest group to reach and pose a significant challenge, particularly when only limited numbers of people can participate in schemes for larger village sizes. Methodologies still need to be further developed and refined to ensure that this group is reached.

Lessons on taking gender and equity forward

The following are some of the key lessons learnt through the experiences of working on gender and equity in the KINNAPA / KDC / WaterAid Kiteto programme and the wider organisation during the period 1999-2002.

Institutional level

- Without organisational wide policies which commit the organisation to considering gender and equity in its work, work and strategies can progress but it is often reliant on individual staff's commitment. This means it can be considered or ignored as the individual manager or representative prefers.
- Without a key person employed with the responsibility and to be the focus for taking forward gender and equity issues within an international organisation, there are always risks of the debates and processes being derailed or dropped as interested staff either move on or face fatigue in their discussions and debates on the subject.
- It takes continued effort to ensure that both men and women have opportunities for posts at all levels and that they are able to retain them. Where women or staff from particular ethnic groups are obvious by their absence, particular attention is needed to encourage and facilitate their involvement.

Programme and project levels

- To work on gender and equity at programme and project levels requires time, funds and commitment. This can only successfully progress if senior line management are supportive of the activities.
- Working with programme and field staff members to get to the point where they are committed to and able to respond to gender and equity issues in their work, takes continued effort and patience to work together and continually discuss and share experiences over a sustained period of time.
- There are limitations on what water, hygiene and sanitation programmes can do in the way of empowerment and social change. Projects which aim to improve water, hygiene and sanitation in rural villages are unlikely to empower all women, for example, from the village in the relatively short time frame that they work there. However they can contribute to improving the situation at least for a few, rather than making it worse, by ensuring that they do consider and respond to unequal power relations in the villages in which they work.

- When demands on staff are high and when working in rural areas where even small tasks can take significant effort, even the most committed staff may sometimes struggle to find the energy and time to continue to push for change in the area of gender and equity.
- Persistence can lead to results. Visible results help to breed confidence in the programme and field teams and have a multiplying effect on action and its effectiveness in follow on activities.

Conclusions

There are still many barriers to be faced when attempting to consider gender and equity throughout organisations, programmes and projects. These include:

- Lack of clear policy, strategy and commitments at organisational level.
- Lack of agreement at management level on whether gender and equity issues should be considered at all.
- Complexity of the subjects.
- Gender activists' own limitations in the face of significant negativity and the sensitivity of the subject.
- The need to understand gender and equity in terms of each context specific environment.
- The lack of guidance found on how to respond to gender and equity issues on a continual basis in daily work (versus how to make the analyses of issues and power relations at the beginning).
- The need to develop specific methodologies for field teams to use and develop to respond to gender and equity issues.
- The training and confidence building needs of all staff as to why there is a need to and how to respond to gender and equity issues.
- Gender and equity issues are entwined with each of our own cultures and personal value systems – these have an impact on our willingness to be involved and commitment to responding to gender and equity issues.
- Learning on gender and equity issues needs to be a continual and dynamic process – getting to the point where the issues can be responded to confidently in the field or in institutions can take significant time.

It is important therefore to not underestimate the difficulties often originating within institutions themselves with regards to attitudes and capacity, in implementing programmes that are gender and equity aware and respond effectively to these issues. But with continued efforts, commitment and resources, positive impacts can be made and appreciated by women and men in the communities in which we work. Working on gender and equity – easier to say, harder to do, but still possible with significant effort.

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