



INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY INTO WATER SECTOR OPERATIONS

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INTRODUCTION

This Technical Guidance Note (TGN) is part of a series of documents on integrating gender equality into the sector operations of Caribbean Development Bank (CDB). The Notes identify key issues which lead to and reinforce gender inequality, and propose possible solutions for addressing them.

The TGNs fall within CDB's strategic objectives of supporting inclusive and sustainable growth and development and promoting good governance, both internally and among its Borrowing Member Countries (BMCs).

This specific TGN Summary focuses on the water sector operations. Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6) asserts the importance of water and sanitation in calling for "access to water and sanitation for all". Water scarcity and poor water quality can result in inadequate sanitation and the prevalence of water-borne diseases. These shortages or lack of access to public water utility services also negatively affect livelihoods and economic productivity, educational outcomes and have particularly negative impacts for women, children and other vulnerable groups.

CDB has recognised the many challenges faced by its BMCs in the water sector, including high levels of water loss and aging infrastructure.

The Bank is currently planning to invest significantly in this sector with the aim of increasing access to a clean water supply across its BMCs.

While access to water is as important for men as for women, it has important gender implications, as access to water helps to alleviate the burden of care and household demands, increases time for productive activities and leisure and significantly contributes to health outcomes.

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KEY GENDER EQUALITY ISSUES IN WATER SECTOR OPERATIONS

1

Water shortages and lack of access to potable water can place more stress on women than men in households.

As women tend to be the main caregivers, the effects of water shortages can increase their workloads. Within the household, water scarcity negatively affects school attendance and can lead to health issues. In countries where women and children still need to fetch water, they are exposed to the risk of physical and sexual violence. It can also cause high absenteeism from work and have an impact on people's livelihoods. Where poor households do not have access to water mains, they may have to purchase water which reduces their available income for other household priorities.

2

Inadequate participation of stakeholders in decision-making and lack of public education on water use and sanitary practices lead to sub-optimal water sector outcomes, especially for women and female-headed households.

A lack of participation in water projects can lead to an exclusion of poor households, often female-headed, from the benefits of the project. This might also lead to a lack of legitimacy of projects. Further, in some households there is not only a lack of trust in public water, resulting in consumers resorting to rainwater or bottled water, but also knowledge gaps about sanitary practices. Impacts include less income available at the household level, consumption of untreated water and negative health outcomes as a result of unsanitary practices.

3

Policy and decision-makers in the Caribbean are not adequately sensitised to gender issues.

In several Caribbean countries, there is limited access to public sector expertise in gender mainstreaming. As a result, there might be a lack of knowledge at the policy and decision-making level as to the interlinkages between gender and water sector outcomes.

4

There is limited access by women to job opportunities in the water sector.

Within the water sector in this region, there is a high proportion of males in jobs in management, construction and maintenance. Women continue to be employed mainly in administrative functions within this sector.

SOLUTIONS FOR INTEGRATING GENDER EQUALITY INTO THE WATER SECTOR OPERATIONS

Water shortages and lack of access to potable water can place more stress on women than men in households.

Projects should be informed by gender-differentials in water-use patterns related to households and livelihoods. This will help utilities to identify the support required to increase access by women and other vulnerable groups to adequate/regular water supply. The key indicators include male/female use of water; time spent collecting water disaggregated by sex and age; the cost of water and health conditions/risks associated with poor water supply, quality and sanitary conditions.

Inadequate participation of stakeholders in decision-making and lack of public education on water use and sanitary practices lead to suboptimal water sector outcomes, especially for women and female-headed households.

There is need for consultation with government and non-governmental organisations, community and agricultural groups, women, men, and vulnerable groups, on a wide range of issues related to water supply that will inform the design, management and pricing of water projects and services.

Training in differential, gender-sensitive participatory methods for water ministries and utilities is a step towards appropriately engaging all kinds of households including the poor and vulnerable in water projects. Stakeholder engagement plans which detail the messages, media and target groups help to formalise such a process and establish a closed feedback loop. Communication support to enhance public education should also carefully choose the messages, media and language of products to reach those most in need.

Policy and decision-makers in the Caribbean are not adequately sensitised to gender issues.

BMCs should identify key policy and decision-makers in the sector and assess the extent to which they are knowledgeable about gender issues. Policy and decision-makers should also receive specific training on basic gender concepts and gender issues in the water sector as well as steps to achieve gender mainstreaming.

Women have limited access to job opportunities in the water sector

There is a need to assess:

- the current male/female balance in occupations in the water sector,
- the extent to which women and girls participate in technical and vocational training and female water engineers and technicians are available as well as,
- the degree to which this is tied to income-generating and decision-making activities in the water sector.

Water utilities can be supported in setting up a gender policy for human resource management to create a workplace that is attractive to both women and men.

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