



## WHOSE RIGHT IS IT?

In September 2000, the United Nations adopted a set of eight interrelated and mutually reinforcing Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The first MDG aims to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015. As part of its contribution to meeting this goal, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations is placing increased emphasis on the provision of water for food security and has identified three basic concerns: to produce more food with less water; to protect water quality and the environment, including human health; and to close the food consumption and production gap, particularly in Africa.

In most parts of the world, women are major actors in agricultural production. Their knowledge of local biodiversity, soil, and water conditions is a significant factor in their capacity to contribute to food security. In many African societies, they are the most important producers of food for local consumption. In Asia or Eastern Europe, they are often employed as agricultural labourers or work on family farms. In parts of the Middle East, they are prominent in post production processes and work in the fields during periods of labour shortage. However, in all parts of the

world, relatively few women own land. An FAO study in India, Nepal and Thailand found that only 10 percent of female farmers actually owned land and a study by the International Fund for Agricultural Development in Syria showed that only 5 percent of women owned land. FAO's Gender and Population Division is seeking to raise awareness about these issues and is helping to develop tools and methodologies that integrate gender concerns into on going work.

### Global Inequities in Water Use

IN AFRICA, HOUSEHOLD WATER USE AVERAGES 47 LITRES PER PERSON. IN ASIA, THE AVERAGE IS 95 LITRES. IN THE UNITED KINGDOM THE AVERAGE IS 334 LITRES PER PERSON PER DAY AND IN THE UNITED STATES THE AVERAGE IS 578 LITRES PER PERSON PER DAY.

UNFPA (2002), WATER: A CRITICAL RESOURCE.



## WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT



In most communities, water supplies are limited and water-use decisions involve difficult choices. Resource economists often recommend that water prices be raised for all uses (industry, agriculture and domestic), arguing that higher prices will encourage more efficient use of water in all sectors. However, the implications for the poor can be negative and lead to increased hardship since they often do not have sufficient financial resources to pay higher prices. While subsidization of water prices has sometimes been suggested as a means of ensuring that water is available for all, the poorest households do not usually have easy access to piped services or irrigation.

Participation of women in water resource management is often promoted by national governments. South Africa offers a positive example.

The country passed its Water Services Act in 1997 and a National Water Act in 1998, which aimed to redress the gender and racial inequalities and discrimination of the past.

In recognition of women's participation in the water sector, the South African government has developed a set of awards to honour and celebrate the contribution of women and highlight their role in poverty eradication, education and sustainable development in both the urban and rural settings.

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## IRRIGATED AGRICULTURE

**Irrigation has increased crop outputs**, by allowing diversification into higher value crops. This has enabled the utilization of technologies aimed at increasing yield, and provided employment for the landless poor. FAO makes a strong argument for the continued importance of irrigation as a central element in efforts to achieve food security.

However, a review of irrigation projects worldwide suggests that they tend to favour richer farmers. Poor men and poor women rarely benefit. The expansion of irrigation schemes is often achieved at the cost of evicting tenant farmers, buying out of marginal farmers, and expropriating land formerly used by the poor. In most countries, access to irrigated water is mediated by race, social status and gender. For example, in South Africa only 5 percent of irrigation water goes to black farmers.

**Irrigation schemes sometimes** upset the balance of local conditions, rights and customs, and devalue the environmental and agricultural knowledge and expertise that women have built up over generations. For example, in the Gambia, traditional swamp rice farming practices and knowledge are being lost as more land is pushed into irrigated fruit and vegetable production for export purposes. Irrigation projects have often been implemented without consideration for existing social and cultural practices and knowledge of the gendered division of labour and responsibilities.

In Kenya, most women were not active members of the water users' associations in the irrigated rice schemes and those who attended meetings were not allowed to speak before men or to express opinions in opposition to those expressed by men. Even when both men and women participated in irrigation schemes, their needs and priorities sometimes differed. In South Asia, female participation in water users' organizations is also minimal. However in Ecuador, women with higher than average levels of education occupy positions of leadership in the water users, organizations.

## SEAGA Irrigation Sector Guide

FAO DEVELOPED ITS SEAGA IRRIGATION SECTOR GUIDE IN 2001 FOR USE BY IRRIGATION ENGINEERS, MEMBERS OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY IDENTIFICATION AND FORMULATION MISSIONS, STAFF OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS, GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES, STAFF OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS AND ENGINEERING AND CONSULTING FIRMS. THE GUIDE SUPPORTS GENDER-SENSITIVE PARTICIPATORY PLANNING OF IRRIGATION SCHEMES. ITS ULTIMATE AIM IS TO IMPROVE IRRIGATION SCHEME PERFORMANCE WHILE STRENGTHENING THE POSITION OF RURAL WOMEN AND DISADVANTAGED GROUPS.



FAO/F. Botts



## RAINFED AGRICULTURE

**In most parts of the world**, women's agricultural work is especially important in rainfed areas. For example, an FAO study in Lebanon showed that women were responsible for sowing, weeding, harvesting and processing. They often have little influence on the decision-making process, especially in the planning and implementation of farm activities. Yields can be improved with moisture preservation and good crop management, mulching, in-site water harvesting and short cycle varieties.



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FAO/P. Johnson



FAO/K. Pratt



## FISHERIES/COASTAL

**Women in Africa and Asia are active in river, lake, pond, canal, and sea fishing.** In many areas, they take leading roles in the development of aquaculture. In Lesotho, and other southern African countries participating in FAO's Aquaculture for Local Community Development Programme, aquaculture provides both income and family nutrition. Women often manage small household ponds where production is aided by warm water and plentiful food, while nutrient-rich runoff promotes plankton growth. Aquaculture has proved to be sustainable because it does not reduce the water resource and is compatible with most other uses (except for domestic use).

**In coastal and lake fisheries,** women often perform most of the work of feeding and harvesting fish, and also process the catch and sometimes undertake marketing.



## WATERSHED DEVELOPMENT

**Watershed development programmes** often have negative affects on the poorest sectors of the community. The majority of watershed projects have emphasized physical and technical planning aspects, rather than economic, social and environmental and ecological concerns. Equity issues have usually not been a prime consideration. In recent years, FAO has emphasized the development and refinement of national policies and programmes related to integrated and participatory watershed management activities. The important role of watershed management, especially with regard to water resources and food security, has received high priority.

**Experience in India demonstrates the need** for communities to become key actors and decision-makers in watershed management. There has been a move towards the development of participatory methodologies for watershed management, relying on the creation of self-help, community-based watershed management committees. However, there is still a possibility that the less advantaged members of the community (e.g. women, youth, and the landless) will be excluded from the committees.



## FOOD PROCESSING AND MARKETING



**In most developing countries** both rural and urban women are involved in petty trading, sale of cooked food, and brewing of ale and beer or other traditional drinks. Other typical informal sector activities that necessitate the use of water, include tea kiosks, processing and selling street foods such as rice balls, roasted maize, or groundnuts,

**Commonly, women's informal sector** activities are extensions of their domestic roles, and they often operate directly from

their homes, sometimes relying on assistance from their children.

Most of these businesses require a low initial capital outlay, but access to water is often essential for both production and sanitation.

There has been little analysis of the importance of access to water in women's choice of particular informal-sector business activities, in the success or failure of their businesses, or in the capacity to expand their business activities.

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## DOMESTIC WATER

The amount of time and effort required to fetch water in many societies has often been recorded, but it is important to note that patterns of water collection, use, and contact change according to season. Although time is important, it is not the only, and sometimes not the most, important factor that influences women's water-collecting behaviour. Cultural preferences and patterns are significant.

The relationship between water and health also is important. Water-borne diseases are prevalent in most developing regions and the WHO estimates that 3.3 million people die annually from diarrhoeal diseases alone. Irrigation and other water development projects are often breeding grounds for schistosomiasis. Villagers living near an irrigation project on the Senegal River showed an almost 100 percent infection rate in people above five years of age. In Africa more women than men are now infected with HIV-AIDS, but women carry the bulk of responsibility for looking after sick family members. The time and attention required by AIDS-affected patients, places another heavy burden on women, who are often mothers, grandmothers or aunts of adult patients. The household need for water to nurse the sick is increased while at the same time the available labour for fetching water is decreased.

### Walking for Water

ONE THIRD OF WOMEN IN EGYPT WALK MORE THAN AN HOUR A DAY FOR WATER; IN OTHER PARTS OF AFRICA, WOMEN SPEND AS MUCH AS EIGHT HOURS COLLECTING WATER. THE AVERAGE DISTANCE WALKED BY WOMEN IN AFRICA IN SEARCH OF WATER IS SIX KILOMETERS A DAY.

UNFPA (2002), WATER: A CRITICAL RESOURCE.

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## DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

Flooding and drought are the two most common forms of "natural" disaster worldwide, but by far the most important cause of emergency evacuation and displacement is not natural disasters, but armed conflict. This has led to the creation of huge refugee communities in many regions of the world. Both male and female refugees are faced with the lack of infrastructure, the effects of human rights violations, political instability, absolute poverty, social disintegration, lack of resources, and environmental degradation. However, since women have the primary responsibility for collecting wood and water for domestic uses and looking after family health, disaster situations, whether caused by natural phenomena or by human interventions, cause special problems. Women's participation in the utilization and management of water resources must be seen in the broader context of their access to productive assets and resources. Many agricultural lands have become unproductive as a result of deforestation, overgrazing, conflict, political instability, poor irrigation practices, etc. Rehabilitation of degraded lands can proceed in a sustainable way only if the needs of poor people living on and around degraded lands are taken into account. This requires a detailed understanding of men and women's local knowledge systems, resource utilization, and income-generating opportunities. Water is a key resource in this process.

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