

UNRAVELLING GENDERED PRACTICES IN NEPAL'S PUBLIC WATER SECTOR IN NEPAL

GITTA SHRESTHA AND FLORIANE CLEMENT

CHALLENGE

Despite decades of gender mainstreaming in the water sector, a wide gap between policy commitments and outcomes remains. Gender mainstreaming in water policies has focused on promoting the participation of women in formal water user associations (WUA) in both water supply and irrigation through quotas for women's membership in these organisations. However, most stakeholders, including national government agencies, recognize the limited outcomes of policy provisions in supporting gender equality and women's empowerment. Government agencies point to gender norms prevailing in rural Nepal as the main factor in creating the gap between policy intentions and practices. But, many scholars emphasize the need to understand how organizations and institutions that design and implement water policies and programs are themselves gendered. Bringing about transformative change for greater gender equality at the local level requires addressing gender inequalities and masculine professional culture within public organizations that drive policymaking and implementation.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This study aims to offer a fresh perspective on such policy gaps, by analyzing how gendered discourses, institutions and masculine professional culture contribute to policy gaps. We reviewed public policies in the water sector. We draw on a series of semi-structured interviews with water professionals from public agencies operating in the water sector, representatives from civil society and non-government organizations (NGOs). Interviews were conducted in Kathmandu in February-March 2017. Respondents represented a mix of engineers, sociologists and gender experts, at different seniority levels. Altogether, 21 interviews (12 females, 9 males) were conducted. To analyze our data, we relied on the TPC framework for strategic change management (Tichy 1983). It was adapted for gender mainstreaming by Oxfam Novib (2010). Our research also drew on earlier studies on gender and water conducted in Nepal to inform our analysis (e.g., Clement et al. 2015).

Water planning and discussions mostly dominated by men in Nepal



INSIGHTS AND INNOVATIONS

The predominant narratives, institutional arrangements and professional culture in the water sector have negatively influenced policy efforts towards gender equality. Gender issues are delimited to the "WUA space," with well-delineated experts, the sociologists, institutional set-up, the GESI unit, and activities. There are no spaces or incentives to reflect on and learn about GESI-related challenges. This has contributed to the technocratic implementation of democratic and participatory decision-making in water management – limited to following fixed procedures that do not address the root causes of injustice. Gender is perceived as a frivolous ethical gloss imposed by donors rather than as a technical subject. The narrow focus on WUAs and the lack of involvement of engineers in improving gender equality infer that many opportunities for more gender-sensitive interventions are lost.

NEXT STEPS

We defend the need to address gender equality within water organizations to support gender equality. We contend that as long as water agencies do not acknowledge the social nature of water and the hegemonic masculinity of the professional culture, policy commitments towards greater gender equality will have little effect on the ground. Therefore, it is important that water institutions pay attention to their own masculine spaces, practices and attitudes, to address equity and justice issues in water resource management.

Figure 1: Entry points to enhance gender equality within organizations

	Mission and mandates	Organisation structure	Human resource management
Technical	<p>Policies and actions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a sector-specific or organisational sexual harassment act and inform staff of its specifics. Allocate sufficient financial means and human resources at the senior management to designing and implementing a GESI action plan and strategy in the water sector. 	<p>Tasks and responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Value skills and attitudes that are generally perceived as 'feminine' (sociology, social mobilisation, empathy, etc.) and include them in performance appraisal. 	<p>Staff capacity and expertise</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage long term or permanent appointments of GESI staff. Ensure that gender-related responsibilities are defined in TOR.
Political	<p>Policy influence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop explicit institutional mechanisms for ensuring the inclusion of women and marginalised groups in project development and the evaluation and monitoring of project activities 	<p>Decision-making</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase the legitimacy and authority of women staff in the water sector to influence decisions on water delivery and management by providing them with necessary exposure and leadership trainings. 	<p>Room for manoeuvre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create incentives for staff to consider GESI while planning, implementing and monitoring.
Cultural	<p>Professional culture</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure gender-equitable and friendly workplaces, infrastructure and facilities, especially in field offices. This can include purchasing a scooter in field offices for women staff, building separate male and female toilets, and providing a private space for breastfeeding mothers. 	<p>Co-operation and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote women role models and support women's networks inside and outside the organisation. Build the capacity and skills of staff across all levels to address GESI issues. 	<p>Attitudes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support courses on gender and water resource management in engineering and technical degrees. Make provisions to recruit or promote gender-conscious staff (technical and non-technical)



For more information: <http://djb.iwmi.org>