

FACT SHEET: WATER & SANITATION

Worldwide, women play an important role in the provision, use and management of water. However, water resource management and other international water and sanitation programmes have often lacked proper mechanisms for taking into account women's needs and concerns with respect to water, failing to recognize the different ways in which women and men use water as well as the ways in which water and sanitation programmes can reinforce existing gender inequalities. Changing rainfall and other climate patterns, a growing global population, and growing competition for water in rapidly industrializing countries, along with other factors will make it increasingly important for programmes to integrate women into every stage of programme design for water resource management in order to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of such programmes and to guarantee water security.

GENDER IN WATER PROVISIONING

Women and girls are usually responsible for the collection of water, which particularly in rural areas can be time- and labour-intensive. Where there is no source of water within the home, the task falls to women in 64% of households to collect it¹. They may walk for several hours for water; according to one United Nations estimate, in sub-Saharan Africa 40 billion hours a year are spent collecting water. This places a great degree of physical strain on women in addition to taking time away from other activities such as girls' education and women's productive activities and exposing them to the risk of violence in transit². Providing access to clean water for the 783 million¹ people who lack it is critical to improving gender equity in the developing world.

A typical water-collection vessel in Africa weighs 40 lbs².



GENDER IN WATER USE

Women use water in different ways than men.

They are the primary users of water for domestic purposes such as cleaning and preparing food, washing, and maintaining sanitary facilities, as well as for agriculture, while men use water more exclusively for agriculture, including irrigation and livestock watering. Water management programmes have often not taken into account these multiple uses of water, and low participation of women in water users' associations (WUAs) reinforces this trend². Supporting women's participation in water management and offering training in water and sanitation-related careers can help ensure that women's concerns are being met while providing them additional economic opportunities³.

GENDER AND SANITATION

Waterborne and other preventable diseases that spread through poor sanitation and hygiene conditions are responsible for more than 2.2 million deaths every year³, and women are at greater risk of this diseases due to their roles in water collection, in caring for the sick, and in the construction, maintenance and repair of sanitation facilities. Girls', girls' school attendance after puberty is also often dependent on the presence of proper sanitation and hygiene facilities for menstruation.

More than **35%** of the world's population does not have access to improved sanitation⁴.



WATER AND LAND RIGHTS

Women's access to water in many places is closely tied in with their access to land; water usage rights and participation in water management initiatives and development programmes are typically linked to land ownership, which may be very difficult for women to obtain. This particularly restricts women's say in the use of irrigation water supplies, for which women often have different preferences than men².