

2 0 2 . 1

8 9 W O

WOMEN IN WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION

A report on the Regional Training Seminar on
Women's Contribution to the International
Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade,
organized by ESCAP and INSTRAW,
Bangkok, 23-27 January 1989

by
Colin Glennie
UNICEF Observer
29 January 1989

202.1 -89W0-6454

WOMEN IN WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION

A report on the ESCAP/INSTRAW Regional Training Seminar, Bangkok 23-27 January 1989.

1. INTRODUCTION

I was asked by UNICEF/EAPRO, Bangkok to attend the above seminar as an observer for UNICEF. I take this opportunity to report back to UNICEF colleagues the principal lessons and ideas presented at and gained during the seminar, which are of specific relevance to UNICEF-assisted programmes in water and sanitation. One of the main benefits of attending such a seminar is that it gives participants time to think and concentrate exclusively on the subject, away from the distractions of BALs, annual reports, workplans, PERs etc! While some of the following ideas are a direct result of this seminar, others were stimulated by attending it, even if they were not directly discussed. I am taking the liberty of including them all in this report, in the belief that the more ideas we consider the better.

Some observations may not seem relevant in the country where you are working. Nevertheless, I hope you find at least some of them useful, or adaptable to your own situation. They may be of particular relevance during a country programming exercise.

2. WOMEN IN WATER AND SANITATION - HOW FAR HAVE WE GOT?

Before proceeding with the report, I should perhaps set the context as I see it. While progress obviously varies between countries, it is fairly safe to say that we have not yet achieved a major global increase in women's involvement in water and sanitation during this decade. However, looking on the positive side, there is now much greater awareness both internationally and nationally of the importance of involving women more, and many countries have gained valuable experience. Most programme and project proposals, appraisals, agreements and evaluations now include the involvement of women, at least to some extent. The challenge now is to mobilize this increased awareness into specific actions, to convert the good intentions and rhetoric into specific policy and practical decisions, and ensure their vigorous implementation so that women really are involved more. This decade may charitably be considered successful if we consider it as a preparatory phase, but in the next decade we must be successful in real terms. The observations and ideas below are presented with this in mind. I have tried to avoid merely repeating the rhetoric.

3. SEMINAR OBJECTIVES AND STRUCTURE

The objective of the seminar was "to create awareness of the necessity to enhance women's involvement and ... ensure their effective participation in all levels of planning and implementation". The participants were mainly female government professionals from national implementing organisations for water, sanitation and public health of the ESCAP region. The seminar consisted of a package of five modules prepared by INSTRAW covering the role and participation of women in planning, choice of technology, implementation, training and evaluation. The modules were presented by resource persons from the region, each presentation being followed by group discussion resulting in certain recommendations. The seminar itself was extremely well run, although the presentations tended to be too lengthy, reducing the opportunity for participation and discussion. A list of national participants is attached.

4. OBSERVATIONS ON THE UTILITY OF THE SEMINAR

- 4.1 While it is essential for there to be a strong representation of women in such a seminar, the fact that almost all were women and that the majority of them did not hold senior policy posts meant that the opportunity was missed to "create more awareness" among the people who have the power to make the decisions in favour of more women's participation. As women, most of the participants were presumably already "aware". If more Chief Engineers or Joint Secretaries had been present, they may have returned to their countries with a new understanding and commitment to involve women more. However, no doubt the participants did benefit from the seminar, and it was heartening to meet such a large group of women who are obviously already very involved in water and sanitation.
- 4.2 The country-level impact of such a regional seminar must necessarily be limited. Success really depends on whether the participants will influence policy and practice in their own country. It may be necessary to organize a similar seminar at country level, targetted specifically on those whose increased awareness can result in specific actions to involve women more. The seminar has already been held at national level in some African countries. I strongly recommend you consider initiating and supporting such a seminar in your country, using the national participant as a principal resource person if appropriate.
- 4.3 I did not find the contents of the modules particularly inspiring - they can be summarised crudely as "we are not doing enough and therefore we must do more". To be fair to the authors, UNICEF staff are not the principle target group. Most of us will be fairly familiar with the issues, and should not need to be convinced of the need to do more - the question for us is how to do more in the country programmes within which we are working. Unfortunately, the modules are very thin on practical examples of the how.
- 4.4 I think we will try to run a similar seminar in Bangladesh, but we will transform the modules into specific examples of problems existing here and gear the seminar to producing policy recommendations which will specifically address each of those problems. We will try to spend time discussing the solution rather than the problem and the need to solve it. You may consider something similar. I suggest you ignore the instruction in the package that the modules should be adhered to, but use them to develop more country-specific modules.

5. SPECIFIC OBSERVATIONS, LESSONS AND IDEAS

5.1 Greater use of existing women's organizations

Some countries of the region have quite powerful and large scale organizations for women which are already involved in development activities. No doubt many of us are already involving these organisations to some extent in our water and sanitation programmes, but I am sure that in most cases there is room for dramatically increasing this involvement at the field level. Do the local level organizations have the information of how their community can improve their water supply and sanitation, how to apply for assistance, what are the basic hygiene messages etc? Are such organizations represented on the local committees which are responsible for implementation of the water and sanitation project or programme? Can they distribute application forms, hygiene education leaflets etc?

5.2 Greater use of existing female field workers

Most countries employ at least some female field workers, though they may not be employed by the department implementing the water and sanitation project or programme. Many health workers are female; often there is a "Department of

Women's Affairs" which also employs field workers; female teachers etc. Do they all have the information necessary to help the communities in which they normally work improve their water supply and sanitation etc, as mentioned above for women's organizations? Could they carry application forms, hygiene leaflets and posters, etc?

5.3 Role of NGOs in support of government programmes

In addition to specific women's organizations, many local and international NGOs are likely to have a better record, and therefore experience, of involving women than national programmes of government. The staff and beneficiaries of these NGOs can be brought in as resource people for the better involvement of women in national water and sanitation programmes if they have the right information. We can ensure they have it and help them to use it.

5.4 Employing more female management and implementation staff

One of the biggest barriers to the increased involvement of women as beneficiaries of UNICEF-assisted water and sanitation programmes is that there are usually very few women in management or field implementation positions, either in UNICEF or government. This is not specific to the water and sanitation sector, being a reflection of the male domination of most societies. However, it is even more important to reduce the imbalance in this sector because of the dominant role that women play as users of water facilities and as upholders of family hygiene and sanitation. Within UNICEF, can we try to identify as many as possible suitably qualified female candidates for the consideration of the Representative and DOP for recruitment against all future UNICEF vacancies in water and sanitation? Focusing on our counterpart government ministries, can we conduct and publish a survey of the number of women as compared to men at the various levels in those ministries? Can we persuade, perhaps as part of a country programming exercise, our collaborating ministries to adopt targets for the percentage of women to be employed at each level within, say, five years? The recruitment of more female field workers may require only a simple policy decision, as in many countries there are likely to be more women with the basic qualifications needed than is likely to be the case at a managerial level.

5.5 Recruiting more female graduates into the sector

The recruitment of more women at managerial level is more likely to be constrained by the shortage of suitably qualified and experienced female candidates in the country. It is very important that management professionals gain genuine field experience at an early stage of their career. Therefore, female graduates need to be recruited into junior government posts so that they can climb up the career ladder alongside their male colleagues. But there is usually no specific attempt to attract female graduates into the profession. Government vacancies should be advertised at universities and other colleges designed specifically to appeal to female graduates with the required qualifications. Can UNICEF advocate and facilitate this? Can we organise study tours of the programmes we support for interested female graduates? Such measures would not by themselves solve the problem but they can certainly help.

5.6 Adapting government job descriptions to be suitable for male or female personnel

Sometimes it looks as if a specific field worker's job cannot be done by a female. But this may be because the job description was written for a much earlier stage of the programme, when the emphasis was on, for example, pump repair rather than hygiene and the involvement of women. Perhaps the job description can be expanded and adapted to the broader needs of the modern

programme, including the involvement of women, so that the job can be done either by a man or a woman? Adapting existing job descriptions is usually much easier than trying to persuade government to create new posts to fulfil the additional functions required of the modern programme. But the rate of improvement will be limited by the rate at which vacancies occur through retirement, resignations, etc.

5.7 Specific involvement of women in implementation procedures

If the standard procedure for implementation requires a public meeting of beneficiaries, are the field workers instructed to ensure women beneficiaries attend? Can the number of women attending be recorded, for monitoring (and motivational) purposes? If beneficiaries are required to sign an application form or an agreement form, can there be a separate column for males and females and a requirement for equal numbers of each? Where a head of household must sign, can this be extended to cover female head of household also?

5.8 Specific involvement of women in operation and maintenance

Most UNICEF-assisted programmes require the involvement of the beneficiaries in operation and maintenance of water supplies. Often the routine maintenance and minor repair of handpumps and public water standpoints is done by a selected beneficiary (usually male) who is given some training and tools. Instead of a single person, can the caretaker concept be extended to a caretaker team of one man and one woman, probably from the same family, both of whom will receive training and be jointly responsible to the other beneficiaries? Where local mobile mechanics are needed, can women's cooperatives or income generating groups be offered training to enable them to provide the service?

5.9 Training designed specifically for women

Training normally plays an important part in UNICEF-assisted water and sanitation programmes, but they are usually designed and presented by males for males. This may be because most government staff in the sectoral ministry and most of the available trainers and resource persons are male. That is not going to change overnight. However, could we set a target for the minimum percentage of females to be trained each year with UNICEF assistance? This will probably mean designing new training courses to tackle specific issues where women can play a major role, rather than trying to get women to attend the normal male-oriented programmes. But there are opportunities even there - for example women's groups as well as men can be trained to make latrine slabs. It is likely that training for women is best when designed and conducted by women. If the expertise is not available within UNICEF or government, we may need to hire the expertise locally - but experienced female trainers may not be familiar with the specifics of the subject, so close technical supervision will be needed. Training material should also be designed or adapted specifically for women trainees.

5.10 Use of mass media to target women

Person-to-person communication is generally agreed to be the most effective way of conveying information and promoting behavioural change. However, because of the usual shortage of female field workers, we cannot rely exclusively on such an approach if we want to reach women. Furthermore, the literacy level of females is usually lower than that of males, which reduces the effect of leaflets, posters and flip-charts on females. The use of mass media, particularly radio and (in some countries) television, is one of the most convenient and economic ways to convey messages to large numbers of women. In some societies, women listen to the radio more than men, especially at certain times of the day.

UNICEF can help develop radio and TV "spots" designed principally for a female audience. In the past UNICEF has usually relied on government to broadcast these messages free of cost. This may no longer be adequate, as few governments are likely to be willing to pay for the broadcasting of these messages repeatedly, at the most popular listening times and over a long enough period necessary really to make an impact (i.e. years). I believe the time has come for UNICEF to pay for public service broadcasting and commercial advertising if the government is unable to allot adequate free air time. In some circumstances it may be more effective to spend \$100,000 on broadcasting than on pumps. Fortunately the choice does not have to be "either/or" - we can usually continue to provide pumps while at the same time paying for broadcasting. Most UNICEF water and sanitation programmes are heavily supported from supplementary funding and my experience is that nowadays most donors would be quite happy for their funds to be spent in this way.

5.11 Film "Prescription for Health"

Many of you will have seen this film, but I was very surprised to see how many participants were not aware of it. It created a lot of interest, because it is an excellent film. It has already been translated into several languages including Bengali, Bislama, Burmese, Cebuano, Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Hindi, Indonesian, Khmer, Malay, Micronesian, Nepali, Sinhala, Thai, Tagalog, Tamil and Waray. We have distributed 40 Bengali copies in Bangladesh, and we have found it a very useful and popular tool for public meetings, etc. The film or video version may be purchased from IDRC, Communications Division, PO Box 8500, Ottawa, Canada K1G 3H9, Telex 053-3753. If your collaborating ministry already has the film, I suggest you follow-up how intensively they are being used, and whether they need more. In Bangladesh, the Government is hardly making use of them, while NGOs are using them a lot.

6. CONCLUSION

The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (that's what INSTRAW means) are to be congratulated for taking such a lead in promoting the involvement of women in water and sanitation. ESCAP also played an important role in organizing this seminar. This seminar reminded me that we in UNICEF are still only beginning, however justifiably proud we may be of our individual achievements. UNICEF is probably one of the few organizations that really can convert the rhetoric into action. One of the first steps, I suggest, is to organize a seminar in your country, taking care to make it as productive as possible, getting the rhetoric over with in the opening speeches and then concentrating on discussing specific actions, trying to set specific goals etc. If you need assistance in preparing and conducting such a seminar, contact:

Ms Stephani Scheer	or	INSTRAW
INSTRAW Consultant		AP 21747
Room 3094		Santo Domingo
UNITED NATIONS		Dominican Republic
New York, NY 10017		Telex: 326-4280 WRA SD
USA.		

Colin Glennie
Coordinator
Water & Environmental
Sanitation
UNICEF, Dhaka
29 January 1989

CG/psb
ref: instraw/wp50/cg_10

**ESCAP/INSTRAW REGIONAL TRAINING SEMINAR ON WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION
TO THE INTERNATIONAL DRINKING WATER SUPPLY AND SANITATION DECADE**

List of National Participants

- AFGHANISTAN : Ms Parwin, Pharmacist, Water Supply and Sanitation Department, Ministry of Public Health, Kabul.
- BANGLADESH : Ms Rahima Nahar, Research Officer, Local Government Division, Bangladesh Secretariat, Dhaka.
- BHUTAN : Ms Dorji Choden, Assistant Engineer, Public Works Department, Thimpu.
- BURMA : Ms Daw Than Than, Township Medical Officer, Primary Health Center, Ministry of Health, Rangoon.
- CHINA : Ms Guo Yao, Programme Officer, All-China Women's Federation, Beijing.
- INDIA : Ms K Sudha Devi, Executive Engineer, Kerala Water Authority, Kerala State.
: Ms Manisha K Mankad, Assistant Engineer, Gujarat.
: Ms K Padmaja, Executive Engineer, Secunderabad.
: Ms H Sharma, Superintending Engineer, Lucknow.
- INDONESIA : Ms Kusniati, Directorate of Drinking Water Supply, Department of Public Works, Jakarta.
: Ms Tinny Suryani, Head of Sub-Division of United Nations and Other International Agencies, Ministry of Public Works, Jakarta.
: Ms Nurkia Tambunan, Directorate of Drinking Water Supply, Department of Public Works, Jakarta.
- LAO PEOPLE'S : Ms Outaki Khamphoui, Chief, Public Health Service, Vientiane
DEMOCRATIC Municipality, Ministry of Health, Vientiane.
- REPUBLIC : Ms Douangta Somphanith, Water Specialist, Chief, Water Survey Section, Ministry of Transport, Vientiane.
- MALAYSIA : Ms Hamidah Hs Mohd Nasir, Senior Executive Engineer, Water Supply Branch, Public Works Department, Kuala Lumpur.
- NEPAL : Ms Nil Keshari Shakya, Acting Divisional Engineer, Department of Water Supply and Sewerage, Kathmandu.
- NETHERLANDS : Mr Jan A Speets, Co-ordinator, Indo-Dutch Water Supply Program, Ministry for Development Co-operation, New Delhi.
- PAKISTAN : Mr S H Rizvi, Additional Secretary, Women's Division, Islamabad.
- PHILIPPINES : Ms Josefina N Ruiz, Deputy Administrator, Administrative Services, Local Water Utilities Administration, Quezon City.
- SRI LANKA : Ms Joyce Miriam Devise Withana, Assistant General Manager (Designs), National Water Supply and Drainage Board, Colombo.
- THAILAND : Ms Theechat Boonyakamkul, Environmental Health Division, Health Department, Ministry of Public Health, Bangkok.
: Ms Wanapa Hongsamat, Community Development Technical Officer, Women and Child Development Division, Community Development Department, Ministry of Interior, Bangkok.
: Ms Methee Larptavee, Educational Supervisor in Home Economics, Supervisory Unit, Samsen Witthayalai, Bangkok.
: Ms Nitaya Mahabhol, Director, Environmental Health Division, Department of Health, Ministry of Public Health, Bangkok.
: Ms Kanlaya Reuksuppasompon, Training Officer, Provincial Waterworks Authority, Bangkok.