

Operationalizing Gender Equity Measures in Water Governance: Lessons from Water Point Committees in Malawi

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Outline of Presentation

- Background
- Theoretical Frameworks
- Methodology
- Discussion of Findings
- Concluding Remarks

Background

- Malawi is no exception to 'water stress' and 'water poverty' experiences—growing population, climate change, much more competing uses for water now
- Malawi appreciates that water is a gendered resource as reflected in policies (National Water Policy and Sanitation Policy)
- National, District and Community structures for governing water are in place.
- Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development (MoAIWD) is semi-devolved...just Operations and Maintenance that is devolved to lower level structures.
- Water sector receives about 3 % of the national budget. is donor funded. And support of rural water supply is marginalized
- Water sector is therefore heavily subsidized and donor dependent
- Initiatives to improve water supply and water governance are underway by different actors

Theoretical Foundation

- Water governance is; “...the range of political, social, economic and administrative systems that are in place to develop and manage water resources, and the delivery of water services, at different levels of society (Global Water Partnership).
- adopting this perspective, water governance is the set of systems that control the set of decision making with regard to water resource development and management.
- Hence water governance is much more about the way in which decisions are made (i.e. how, by whom, and under what conditions decisions are made) than the decisions themselves
- The reform agenda has shifted water governance from being state-centric to multiple-actor oriented involving state, non-state actors, local communities and private sector.

METHODOLOGY

- **Research Sites:** Blantyre Rural (Mpemba and Chileka Areas)
- **Why?** Have Functional Water Point Committees and facilities that were established through different initiatives
- **Research Design:** Mixed-qualitative and quantitative but skewed towards qualitative research design
- **Data Sources:** Key Informant Interviews, literature review, transect walks and Focus Group Discussions (for qualitative data) and Household Questionnaires (for quantitative data)
- **Sampling Technique:** Key Informants sampled through purposive and snowball techniques whilst household questionnaires respondents sampled randomly.
- **Data Analysis:** Content (for Qualitative data) and Statistical Package for Social Scientists used to process Quantitative data

FINDINGS

1) Initiating Construction of Water Points and Provision of Water- Whose Responsibility?

- In ideal situation, the responsibility to provide water in rural communities is mainly that of Government
- Top three were Ministry of Health (55 %), NGOs (14 %), and Blantyre Water Board, Chiefs, and MPs (6 % each)
- In practice, it is NGOs because Government, in particular MoAIWD financially constrained (Dept of Irrigation and Water Development gets less than 3 % of National Budget).
- NGOs are perceived to be quick, responsive and have funds.
- MoAIWD at the local level is overshadowed by MoH because water is considered to be sanitation issues. This perception is reinforced by MoH (HSAs) attending to matters that are within the mandate of MoAIWD.

- MoAIWD has few extension workers (Water Monitoring Assistants) on the ground as compared to MoH
- There is policy clash between MoAIWD and MoH whereas policy holders of National Water Policy and National Sanitation Policy is MoAIWD and MoH, implementation of these policies, in particular Sanitation Policy, is done by MoH.
- The policy clash is downplayed in public but competition for resources exists between these Ministries as evidenced by the existence an injunction restraining MoH to implement Water and Sanitation activities.

2) Awareness of Formal and Informal Policies and Rules on Access and Use of Water

- Majority of community members in Mpemba and Chileka areas are not aware of Government laws and policies regulating access and use of water. In particular, 89 % of the respondents indicated that they do not possess knowledge about legal and policy instruments of Government governing access and use of water.
- 11 % of the respondents who indicated that they know Government policies and laws failed to state specific policies and laws guiding water sector
- 92 % of the sample responded in affirmative to the question on their knowledge about communal rules and regulations. They were also specific and articulate about them.

2) Awareness of Formal and Informal Policies and Rules on Access to Water (Contd')

- Three top community-made rules were (1) keeping water point premises clean (indicated by 70 %), (2) making a monthly monetary contribution (21 %), and no jumping of of queue (4 %).
- The findings above raise a debate on the efficiency of formal institutions to govern water sector in an environment where they are in a state of flux.
- The state law is at a distant location from point of action hence not efficient enough in providing necessary 'humanly devised constraints (and freedom)' (North, 1990) to resolve local affairs. The communal rules and regulations have to a large extent substituted the state coded institutional framework.
- The invisibility of state the apparatus in rural areas has created a vacuum leading to the emergence and prominence of communal regulations

3) Women Participation in Rural Governance Structures

- Membership of women in both Mpemba and Chileka was below the standard set by the MoAIWD, thus, less than half of members.
- All WPCs were elected by community members as required by Guidelines.
- A key distinguishing feature between Mpemba and Chileka WPCs was that Mpemba WPC had positions of chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary occupied by women despite women being less than half of total membership whilst Chileka WPC had most of women as committee members.
- Women in key position in Mpemba WPC did not translate into them being active members

3) Women Participation in Rural Governance Structures

- Why: (1) elite hijack, (2) lack of knowledge and (3) inconveniences deliberately created by men counterparts-fixing meetings at awkward time.
- Traditional and Civic Leaders have captured the WPCs by 'Incorporation Strategy'- "...local citizens may feel that they have some involvement in decision making processes, yet this is illusory: control over resources remains in the hands of others, both inside and outside the local structure."
- Traditional Leader- "*...to avoid being perceived as sympathizers of the opposition parties and not serving the Government of the day as required by the law, we are not in the committee but we have our eyes and ears in the committee.*"

4) Female WPC Members-Views of Fellow Women

- 92 % of respondents in Chileka and Mpemba areas knew female committee members of WPC.
- it was established that knowledge of women about their fellow women in the WPC does not necessarily translate into close working relationship of the two parties.
- Despite concerns raised by women regarding water governance and access to water, they have not organized themselves to present their concerns to leadership and women committee members in particular.
- To this effect, 66 % of respondents indicated that they do not know of any initiatives by women to present their views to leadership and get them accountable for their action.
- More of material participation than 'voice and demanding' participation

Concluding Reflections

- Rural decentralized water governance has contributed to the increase of number of women in WPCs with some of them occupying positions of influence. However, despite increase in number of women in WPCs with the responsibility of making critical decisions about supply at local communities, effective transformation is yet to be realized
- The state law is limited in actuating influence in rural water governance because of invisibility of public machinery at the local level, in particular MoAIWD, and poor service delivery. Lack of knowledge about state law and policies has also constituted to the inability of community members to navigate through the structures and institutional framework and demand water facilities.

Concluding Reflections Contd'

- The Guidelines set by MoAIWD have to be honoured with a small window of flexibility for bureaucrats to exercise discretion so as to accommodate contextual factors.
 - Observation of standards will require strengthening the financial base of Local Councils.
 - The status quo where Local Councils get monthly subvention not even enough to drill one borehole is not encouraging.
- Advocacy-Non-state actors will have to utilize policy spaces accorded to them for policy influence and change . Non-state actors are represented in technical working groups of Joint Sector Review Meetings.

Thank You

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