



Self Help Africa

*Our vision is a rural Africa
free from hunger and
poverty*


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**Should women be involved in
planning and implementation of
water and sanitation projects?
Lessons from Balaka, Malawi**



- Acute shortage of safe drinking water and poor sanitation remains one of the biggest challenges to development for rural communities in Malawi.
- 80 per cent of the population live in rural areas and more than 3.5 million people consume water from contaminated rivers, lakes, wells and streams in the country.
- greater strides have been made in improving access to water and sanitation services across the globe, it has been acknowledged by several authors that a lot is yet to be done in African countries.
- Challenge: most problems to do with access to water and sanitation are aligned along the gender divide in the society. The general consensus on this has been a call to involve women in the planning and implementation of water and sanitation projects. Since then, a number of initiatives have been developed aimed at improving the involvement of women.
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What is in the paper

- Explores the extent women should be involved in planning and implementation of water and sanitation projects.
 - Various strategies employed by development organisations; their strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities.
 - Utilising case study approach
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- A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, curved, light blue and white shapes, resembling a stylized wave or a series of connected arcs, located in the bottom right corner of the slide.

Introduction

- climate change, disasters and conflicts are affecting access to safe and sustainable water resources, women and girls can be particularly vulnerable.
- women and girls are responsible for collecting and using water for domestic purposes including sanitation and health
- . It is men who make decisions about water resources management and development at both local and national levels.
- Even though women have a wealth of knowledge on the subject, it is often overlooked in the formulation of projects due to their exclusion in water governance processes. This is in spite of the 90 % of women that are involved in the gathering of water and wood in the households (International Decade For Water For Life 2005-2015)

- Baden (1999) reports that a failure to consult women early in project preparation can result in non- use of the facilities and women to be by passed at a later stage.

- 1977 United Nations Water Conference at Mar del Plata, the International Drinking Water and Sanitation Decade (1981-90) and the International Conference on Water and the Environment in Dublin (January 1992), recognizes the central role of women in the provision, management and safeguarding of water.

- the resolution establishing the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Life' (2005-2015), calls for women's participation and involvement in water-related development efforts. (Interagency Task Force on Gender and Water, 2006)
- Kate Fogelberg, South America Regional Manager at Water For People, explains, “It’s a woman that’s going to benefit from a sustainable service over time (Women In WASH, 2014)

- integrating a gender-sensitive approach to development can have a positive impact on the effectiveness and sustainability of water interventions and on conservation of water resources.
- It helps governments to avoid poor investments and expensive mistakes; makes projects sustainable

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- Leads to effective new solutions to water problems
- It is therefore a general recommendation that emerges across the resources that using a gender analysis is crucial

- It is then vital to incorporate these views in planning and design stage of any water focused project or policy, and following on from this, for the direct involvement of both women and men at all levels of water governance and management.
- The purpose of this paper is to explore the extent to which women should be involved in planning and implementation of water and sanitation projects

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS IN MALAWI

- Mwamsamali .O. and Mayo .W. , 2013 noted that women in decision-making positions at head office of the Ministry responsible for water affairs constitute about 11.1% only.
- No budgetary allocations were made for gender issues and that since the 2006/07 fiscal year about US\$14,286 was allocated for gender mainstreaming.

- water committees have 60% women and 40% men whereas participation in projects activities is highly rated at 97.2%.
- To improve gender balance, the Ministry responsible for water has to work with stakeholders in the education sector. Addressing these issues would, therefore, result in better gender integration in the water sector

- Ministry of Works, Water development (1988) did a study on management of water piped facilities -non-payment was not lack of willingness or capacity to pay, but too rigid and poor local management
- need to tackle the relationships between men and women in water management.

- no gender analysis was carried out- assumed that the committees responsible for managing the communal water points would automatically be dominated by women.
- 80 to 90% members of the water committees turned out to be men-not performing satisfactorily, mainly because the majority of the men were outside the

- neighbourhoods during most of the day time. No consultation of women during the planning phase resulted in poor location, inconvenient design and subsequent wrong use of the water points.

INVOLVING WOMEN AND GENDER FRAMEWORKS

- The United Nations General Assembly during its 58th Session in 2005 declared the period 2005 to 2015 the International Decade for Action “Water for life”. Resolutions- participation and involvement of women in water-related development efforts. -Millennium Development Goals which seeks to “halve by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation” would be realized.

- [Di Ciommo and Schiavetti \(2012\)](#) people ignore and sabotage development initiatives if their perspectives are not included in the design of the initiatives. Since women are regarded as active users of water and sanitation services, it is therefore vital to ensure that their views are integrated into the planning of the projects.

- Studies from Kenya and Malawi -projects with women in the decision-making positions showed more resilience than those that had more men in the leading positions ([Were, Roy et al. 2008](#)).
- Literature demands women to be treated as equal participants in development.
- Challenges- social, cultural, economic and political dynamics in various parts of the world..

- In Sub-Saharan Africa- women are regarded as inferior to men such that they cannot be accorded some positions of significance in the society according to cultural traditions. This is in contrast with the West where empowerment of women both socially and economically has led to increased recognition of women voices, and gender disparities rarely exist.

- Since the 19th Century, several frameworks have been developed aimed at fostering the involvement of women and understanding their roles and interests in development initiatives

STRATEGIES USED BY ORGANISATIONS IN INVOLVING WOMEN IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF WATER AND SANITATION PROJECTS

- 90% of African women are involved in collection of water in households, development organisations are ensuring that women are part of the designing of the water and sanitation projects- through

(a) Developing strong mechanisms for effective targeting and verification of vulnerable groups

Strengths

- Effective as women are reached in places where they are mostly found hence they are aware of the upcoming or existing water and sanitation project in the area.
- Concerns of women are taken on board at the inception phase of the project as they are involved in the design stage of the projects. This include citing and running rules of the water point.

Weaknesses

- Can not be a standalone.
- Women tend to discourage each other from participating in the projects as they are already overloaded with other domestic chores.

(b) Provision of gender-appropriate training/ awareness that involves men and women

Strengths

- Necessary knowledge and skills to manage the water points.
- Women are enlightened on their rights and responsibilities as they are managing the water points
- **Weaknesses**
- High illiteracy hinders women to effectively understand their roles during the trainings
- Provision of training does not necessarily mean putting the theory of what has been learnt into practice. One of the skills that women fail to put into practise is the skill to maintain the waterpoints when they break down.

(c) Promotion of a range of opportunities including in leadership positions for men and women in the management of water points

• **Strengths**

- Management of water points (in terms of hygiene) becomes easier as women are solely the users of water points.
- Women are given an opportunity to make decisions on water points according to their liking.

• **Weaknesses**

- High illiteracy levels of women which inhibits their active participation if put in water points committees
- Since water points issues are the concern of women in 90% of African households, women tend to dominate in the committees yet their contributions in terms of maintenance of the water points is minimal.

- Socio-economic and cultural Context Of The Project Area Analysis
- Persuasion of local leaders, communities, government offices and the private sector to address constraints posed by customary systems, norms, social institutions that limit the choices and opportunities available, particularly to women.-

Strengths

- Influential leaders key in reducing the barriers that women face when they are taking leading positions in the communities
- **Weaknesses**
- Difficult to track whether the customs that discourage women from taking leading positions in the communities have really stopped.

EXPERIENCES OF SELF HELP AFRICA IN IMPLEMENTATION OF WATER AND SANITATION PROJECTS(Case Study)

- Self Help Africa embarked on a food security project in Traditional Authority Kalembo in Balaka. Realising that food security without safe drinking water was solving half the problem. The
- dug shallow wells (19)
- maintained bore holes (5) in the area.

Balaka Profile

- **Gender Distribution Of Balaka**
- 1998 census indicated that at district level, there were more women than men. Affected management of sanitation and water points -females who are not well conversant of the projects, the projects are doomed to fail.

On religion

- 1998 census 64% christians, 29% are Moslems or practice Islam. Islam religion has a culture of not letting women speak in public.- affected sanitation projects implementation as ownership of the sanitation projects no sustainability of the water source
- One woman said, ***we did not even know how to maintain the water point such that when it breaks down we have to wait for the men to fix it for.***

STEPS FOLLOWED BY SELF HELP AFRICA IN INCOOPERATING
WOMEN IN SANITATION PROJECTS

- In order to ensure that there is shared responsibility and ownership in taking care of the source of water, the project mainstreamed gender and the following were the stages that Self Help Africa followed



Design Stage and Location Of Facilities

- Planning, design, implementation, and maintenance of a water project ensures that water, as a resource is efficiently and effectively used by the community. Water management involves the participatory approach of empowering communities especially women to provide, protect and safeguard their own water sources (Vijita, 1996).
- **Design Stage**
- SHA used this stage to ensure that appropriate technologies are promoted that took the views of women were taken into consideration. The technologies which were chosen by women that they should be promoted were MALDA pumps (Malawi Direct Action pump) which were user friendly and easy to maintain. This was chosen against the boreholes which required more effort to draw water than MALDA pumps.



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Woman using MALDA Pump



ii) Citing Of Facilities

- Women can also be influential in decisions concerning location, applicability of sharing arrangements of water sources and use the time they meet at the water source discuss issues of water and effect change. If women have spend so much time at the well their other obligations cannot be full filled and trying to spend the shortest time possible they might end up in conflict. SHA involved women in feasibility studies and on choosing the sites for water source to ensure distance covered to draw water is reduced for them to fulfil all the households obligations and prevent health risks like musculoskeletal disorders (Neck and upper limb disorders and back pain injuries) which comes about due to prolonged heavy lifting.(European Agency For Safety and Health At Work, Undated)

(b) Construction Stage

- Men and women
- provided materials like bricks and water for construction of the wells. Shared responsibilities in bricklaying. This made the women to own the projects as they were involved throughout the process. Empowered women more and made them to initiate sourcing funds for maintenance of the sanitation projects for quick maintenance in case of breakdown.
- Inclusion of men was deliberately done in order to reduce the burden on women and make the communities split the work with an equitable share of duties. This was to avoid a scenario reported by Deda et al (2004) where management group consisting only of women was set up in a certain community to replace the men, and water supply was reported to have improved, however the burden was too much for the female-only group and communities now split the work with an equitable share of duties.

- Committees composed of both men and women were trained in maintenance and ensuring that the place is habitable. In maintenance of the wells it meant both men and women mobilizing funds for maintenance as well as having a duty roster for



opening, cleaning and closing the source of water. The water committees had 60% women and 40% men.

METHODS

- **Semi structured Interviews**
- Interview guide was used to collect information from beneficiaries on planning and involvement of women in water and sanitation projects. Aimed at understanding the level women had been involved in planning sanitation projects.
- The second part concentrated on the obstacles that were encountered during the involvement of women in water and sanitation projects and the last part was on how the implementation can be improved in achieving effective results.

Data Collection

- Qualitative research was used as the research sought to study individuals in a natural setting. The tools used to collect data were key informants interviews and observations. The data was collected from different people for triangulation purposes.

Sample Size

Study Group	Population	Sample	Sampling Method
Village Coordinating Committees	20	7	Purposeful Sampling
village Health Committees	20	7	Purposeful Sampling
Staff	1	1	Purposeful
Beneficiaries	3040	70	Purposeful

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Questions Used

- **How is the community ensuring that Women Are Participating In Water and Sanitation Projects?**
- *Participation:* All 7 committees (for VHC and VCC) revealed that communities had ensured that there is minimum of 30% of women in a committee whose task was to ensure that women issues are taken into consideration when choosing a technology to be promoted and citing of water facilities. The percentage of the women in the committees was 60% as there were more women than men in the implementation area.
- 100% local leaders sensitise the communities in every meeting emphasising on the inclusion women in development work.

What has been achieved in the communities to show women are involved in planning of water and sanitation projects

- **Design stage**: 60 % of the respondents reported change since women were involved in planning of water and sanitation projects. 30%- minimum change, 10% had not seen any change ever since SHA started implementation of sanitation and water projects. Change- women were very active in choosing the design of the water pumps to be promoted in the area and siting stage as they benefited during the usage of the facilities. Citing of the facilities were consistent with their liking.

- This proved to be a success as women accessed and used the facilities with ease. This concurs with (Kabonesa, 2003) where she said women influence should be particularly strong in technology choice according to what they can manage in their locality. They need to influence the design of facilities for water use, which forms part of their daily routine.
- **Construction Stage:** During construction of the shallow wells (civil works) men and women were sharing responsibilities in that women were providing sand and bricks to the site whilst men were digging the shallow well and brick laying.

- There were instances where women were also brick layers in the projects which was new in the implementation area.
- **Maintenance of sanitation projects:** Women were more active in mobilising funds for maintenance of water points than men. This created an opportunity for the communities to have funds for the maintenance of the borehole. This is concurring with Mudzingwa .N. (2012) who reported in study done in Zimbabwe on maintenance of water points where women remained active throughout in ensuring water points are maintained.

On cleanliness

- There had been improved cleanliness in the surroundings with innovativeness of introductions of vegetable gardens around the shallow wells. Mainly done by women as sourcing relish was taken as the responsibility of women. Need to woo more men in this especially establishing vegetable gardens around water points as they could be a source of funds to maintain the water points.
- **Leadership roles:** The water points had committees responsible for governance. Observations made were that men in the committee wanted to be taken as

Leadership roles cont....

- heroes and not failures hence performing their duties accurately, however in the process leaving out women behind. For example in the maintenance of boreholes men did not give women ample time to ensure they learn the skills in maintenance of borehole. This affected the project in that in other times water point services stayed 3 to 4 weeks without functioning because men were busy with other tasks and women could not fix them on their own. This resulted into women drawing water from a far.

What has not been achieved

- In the sanitation and water projects, there was need to balance responsibilities to ensure there is no gap in the usage and taking care of the services. Women were taken to be the care takers of the water points services in terms of hygiene whilst men were supervising whether hygiene standards are being met. Some of the gaps are mention below:

Maintenance of water points

- 20% of the women in the committees were found to be confident in maintaining the water points on their own. This might have been due to cultural influences where women might have been hindered from putting new skills and knowledge into practice by cultural or social factors. This agrees with what (Kabonesa, 2003) reported that cultural constraints often made it difficult for women to be active trainers or promoters in rural water supply programmes, despite the fact that they might be the only ones who could actually reach out and respond to the needs of women.

- illiteracy levels affect the uptake of the skills and lack of self confidence in maintenance of the water points. This calls for activities that may boost women's literacy levels as well as self confidence in order to maintain water points in time.
- In the 7 committees women were better in mobilising funds for the maintenance of the water points than men but were reluctant to go to service providers who sold the parts. They would hand over the money to men. Contributing factors for reluctance to go and look for the needed parts were distance to access the

- parts, fear of moving long distances as they were not used to going out of their communities and fear of buying wrong parts. Women were afraid to go to town as they were not used to doing that, men were the ones who frequented the town. Women not confident they would buy the correct parts as there might be various parts and the shop owners might confuse them and lead them into buying wrong parts.
- This delayed the maintenance of the water points as men would first deal with what was a priority to them.

- Men do not take it as a priority as they would still get the water if they needed it because women will ensure that water is found in the household. There is need of ensuring that the parts are accessible within their communities.
- **Construction Of Water Points:** The communities had some women who were skilled brick layers who could use their skills in sanitation projects when these skills were needed. Observations made were that even if a woman was able to lay bricks she would prefer to

- provide materials to the male artisans than participate in the brick laying. This was so as brick laying was taken more as a man's job than a woman's. Women who were skilled reported that men were heroes in the communities and even though women may tried to do what men did men remained experts. Women were not confident enough as they always thought that something would go wrong during the construction. It was observed that men were not giving the support women needed for them to have confidence as it was also an opportunity for the men to raise income for their households.

- This deprived women of the opportunity to increase income for their households. In these types of projects brick layers were provided with honoraria to thank them for the services they were providing to the communities.
- **What have been the hindering factors**
- **Limited Resources:** There was need for frequent meetings, refresher courses as well as visiting other projects where women were doing well in their provision of services to sanitation projects.

Roles Of Women:

- 40% of the respondents thought that_ multiple roles (taking care of children, the sick and ensuring that food is available at a household) of women hinders them in contributing to their maximum in water and sanitation projects.
- **Illiteracy:** 70 % of the respondents revealed that illiteracy was a contributing factor to reduced contributions by women to water and sanitation projects. Illiteracy levels among women were high in Balaka hence they were not able to contribute much in the trainings as they needed to take notes for them to refer to in times of need.

Culture and Religion:

- 100% of the respondents reported that culture and religion in the area hinders women from actively participating in the water and sanitation projects. Women were taken to be an inferior sex and could not actively contribute where men were.

What have been the success factors?

- 40% of the respondents revealed that involvement of women in planning of sanitation projects had given women energy in ensuring continuity of the projects in the absence of development organisations. Women had realised that they were the centre of sanitation projects.

- Their absence in planning of the sanitation and water projects could greatly affect the services in their communities.
- **What limitations and weaknesses must be addressed?**
- 100% of the respondents revealed that lack of manuals for the communities to refer to in ensuring that women were involved at every stage of sanitation projects to was a weakness which led to committees having difficulties to convince the communities on the practice.

- 100% revealed that lack of refresher courses on maintenance of water points for women led to poor application as they might have forgotten what they were told and also in case of new leadership who might not have been trained on the concept.
- 80% reported that the absence of maintenance parts in the communities rendered the women's efforts useless as they were not able to access the parts within reach.

What advice can you give to the organisation when involving women in planning of water and sanitation projects?

- 30% of the respondents reported the need timing when bringing in water projects in the communities if women are to be involved fully in the planning. In Balaka there are initiation ceremonies seasons where women fully participate in the activities. If a project is brought to the communities during this time no woman would participate in the project.
- 100 % reported that the involvement of women at the feasibility stage was very vital as they were the ones collecting water for the households

- 90% commended the organisation for encouraging the women to be involved in the maintenance of the sanitation and water projects as the communities had funds readily available for the maintenance of the projects.
- 10% reported that culture and religion had to be considered. Kalembo, where SHA has implemented sanitation projects, is dominated by moslems where women are not expected to lead where men are. For programme delivery to be successful, men should be

- fully involved and sensitisation on gender equality intensively done for men to understand the roles women take in sanitation projects for them to accept their involvement in the projects.
- 90% reported that timing of the introduction of sanitation projects needed to be considered if women are to be involved in the projects. There is need to consider the season when the farmers are not doing much of agriculture interventions. This is because in Malawi 52% of agriculture activities are done by women.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

- **Issue 1: Maintenance Of Sanitation and Water Projects:**
- Women are good in mobilising of funds for maintenance of water and sanitation projects but leave the moneys in the hands of men who may mismanage the funds. This is correlating with what (Lundqvist, undated) reported that men get tempted to misuse the money for water points if not controlled.
- **Issue 2: Access Of Water Points Spare Parts**
- Women were reluctant to go to service providers who might have maintenance parts for the sanitation projects.

- This made them rely on men on decision making as to when the water point would be maintained as they waited for the men's convenient time. These were also the findings by (Lundqvist, undated)
- where women relied on men on technical issues on water points so men still maintained the decision making process despite women being in control of the water points. Organisations need to ensure that the parts are available within reach in the communities for easy access to women. Availability of spare parts is a critical factor to keep the system infrastructure working properly. (Davis and Liyer, 2002)

- concurs with Harlod in Skinner et al (2003) who indicated that technology type, operating and maintenance, capacity and acceptance of rural people and spare parts accessibility issues were of importance in sustainability of services given.
- **Issue 3: Illeteracy Levels Of Women**
- Illeteracy levels of women were contributing to low contribution on management of water points in the area. The illiteracy levels reduced the capacity of women to input into water resources use and management and were further hampered by lack of

- exposure to science and technology. Rathgeber (1996). This leads to women to concentrate on hygiene aspects and establishment of vegetable gardens at the water points rather than decision making. As was pointed out by [Ahlers and Zwarteveen \(2009\)](#), the plea for women's voice in decisions affecting their everyday life has been long overdue. Women have continued to have their voice suffocated in different arenas. This study, however, finds that one of the main reasons women suffer in silence is their lack of power to stand up to the man because they are mostly less or completely uneducated.

- For instance, the Welfare Monitoring Survey conducted in 2009 in the country indicated that literacy levels among men are higher (77%) than women (57%) in Balaka district ([Malawi Government 2009](#)). This was collaborated by the interviews where women expressed that they were uncomfortable to stand in front of men and they felt that only women who are educated can be in a strong and good position to challenge the decisions made by men and contribute in a meaningful way if they are chosen to participate in the process of making decisions.

- Following this result, we argue in this paper that organisations that seek to level out the playing ground for both women and men need to understand the literacy cross-section of the particular community. This would be very significant as the organisations can be in a position to integrate relevant capacity building activities into their projects.
- **Issue 5: Culture and Religion**
- Culture and religion have to be considered. In Kalembo where SHA has implemented sanitation projects, is dominated by moslems

- where women are not expected to lead where men are. Observation was that, although women outnumbered the representation of men in sanitation activities in Balaka, women are culturally not entitled to make decisions when men are around.
- This is unsurprisingly so as even their religious orientations do not allow women to speak let alone say a prayer when a man is available. Organisations and practitioners ought to understand the cultural background in order to develop solutions that would fit into the structure of the society.

- For programme delivery to be successful, men were fully involved and sensitisation on gender equity was intensively done for men to understand the roles women take in sanitation projects for them to accept their involvement in the projects. Deliberate targeting of women in leadership positions as well as in development can work if the mind set of the community has been handled. Much as organisations intensify on deliberate targeting the issue of religion and culture should not be completely left out.

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Issue 6: Timing of program activities

- Women perform all the household chores including responsibility for nurturing and raising children. This makes it almost impossible for them to be available when they are needed to participate in development initiatives on regular schedules. They admitted that they would not be comfortable to attend meetings if done in the morning and during rainy season as they attend agriculture fields. As was noted earlier in this paper, 80% of agriculture activities are dominated by women in the study area and they therefore give it top priority.



Conclusion 1: Maintenance Of Sanitation and Water Projects

- It is high time women are trained and mentored to have self esteem and confidence to ensure the spare part is replaced and the water point continues to function. Men need to change their attitude and be able to give opportunity to women during maintenance by taking them through on job training up to the time women are able to maintain the water points without the assistance of men.

Conclusion 2: Access of Spare parts

- Packaging of water projects should include easy access of spare parts for water points.
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- This will reduce the waiting period and costing of accessing the spare parts once the water point has broken down. Organisations can discuss with shop owners around the communities to ensure that they stock spare parts for their own water source.
- **Conclusion 3: Illiteracy Levels Of Women**
- In sanitation projects there is need to work with women who have the capacity in ensuring sanitation projects are effective and efficient. Most of the able women are literate and not illiterate.

- However those who are able but illiterate due to unforceable circumstances need to be drilled well for them to contribute effectively to the development of the community. Women chosen in the water point committees should be able women who can make a decision throughout the process of water management. If there are illiterate women and are able to learn, efforts should be made to ensure they learn how to read and write. This can be done through an adult literacy class or through friends in the community who can volunteer themselves to teach others. .



- **(a) Targeting Instruments:** Develop strong mechanisms for effective targeting and verification of vulnerable groups- Women are put in the vulnerable group because they lack the needed empowerment. The group requires much effort for them to be involved in the development activities.
- **(b) Capacity building:** Provision of gender-appropriate training/ awareness that involves men and women-Appropriate trainings to be done when implementing the water and sanitation projects. The trainings be gender sensitive in a way that women and men's roles and responsibilities are specified as an output to the trainings.



- Thank You So Much







