International Water Management Institute

ReWaterMENA Thematic Brief

Gender mainstreaming in water reuse

Guidelines for planners, investors, project designers and operators

Main issues

The implementation of a gender mainstreaming approach in water reuse projects will positively impact men, women, and children in the Middle East and North Africa region.

Gender is a socialization process that ascribes values to men, women, youths, and children based on who they are rather than what they can do. Historically, women and other socially excluded groups, have been overlooked in country implementation projects largely for who they are. Gender mainstreaming draws attention to these gender-based constraints, inequalities, and biases. Water reuse project designers and implementers can use the gender mainstreaming approach and ensure that everyone will benefit from the projects. Gender mainstreaming means integrating a gender equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programs, and projects.

Gender mainstreaming approaches can be integrated in water reuse project cycles so that equal opportunities can be offered to all members of society.

Gender mainstreaming is a good start for interventions in the water reuse projects but the goal is a gender transformative approach. This approach aims at challenging and changing norms and values while reconfiguring power relationships thereby promoting equality between women and men. Gender integration must be carried out at all stages of the project cycle of water reuse projects.

This policy brief provides guidance for governments, development, and financing institutions to enable project designers and implementers to understand and address the differences between and among women, men, girls, and boys in terms of their relative ownership, distribution and control over resources, opportunities, constraints, and power across the project cycle.

Context

Demand for freshwater resources is increasing due to population growth, urbanization and agriculture expansion and intensification. The Middle East and North Africa is one of the most arid regions on Earth and is characterized by low water availability. Agriculture is the dominant water user in most countries in the region and a key driver of economic development. The gap between the water supply and demand is widening every year.

Governments in MENA are urgently seeking interventions to increase water security, including efforts to optimize water management, narrow the supply-demand gap and prevent water quality degradation. One promising solution is the smart use of water that has already been used. Water can be used in cities and reused in agriculture or other beneficial purposes, with benefits for all. Water reuse has great potential to help overcome some of the challenges posed by the increasing pressure on already stressed water resources.

Key points

- Women can bring a unique perspective to water reuse projects which is lost through the current exclusion
- Water reuse project teams can address gender in the project cycle by using four approaches presented in the form of questions
- Employment opportunities can be created by recognizing the multiple skill and financial benefits from women engagement and by removing constraints and barriers to their employment in water reuse projects

Fatima's Story

Fatima lives in Amman, Jordan with a family of four. She faces barriers to accessing wastewater connections. Neither Fatima nor her neighbors could connect their household sewage to a public network as they need the permission of the adjacent landowner. She reduces her use of water to minimize the frequency of emptying the septic tank. Improving the management of fecal sludge in her community through promoting resource recovery and reuse solutions would reduce the economic burden on desludging her septic tank. Governmental regulations largely ignore wastewater management in peri-urban areas. Gendered Inclusion in designing, implementing, and monitoring wastewater projects would provide sustainable solutions for those left behind.

Gender mainstreaming approach

Men and women play different roles in society and have different needs. These roles and needs differ depending on the country, region, ethnic group, or other determining factors that shape and organize societies. Gender mainstreaming recognizes these differences and calls for integrating a gender equality perspective at all stages and levels of policies, programs, and projects.

Traditional project design may cater to the needs of the dominant group in a society. Gender mainstreaming offers an alternative and aims to intentionally bring the gender-based constraints, inequalities, and biases into the mainstream thinking. Gender mainstreaming therefore broadens the scope for designing and implementing inclusive projects and programs that enhance the well-being of both women and men and creates a more socially just and sustainable society.

The importance of gender in water reuse projects

Gender is a central issue to be analyzed in the design and implementation of water reuse projects. Project designers need to consider the current roles and responsibilities of women and men; asset ownership; access, use and control of resources; and differential benefits in the value chain. They also need to recognize that men and women use water differently.

Women form most of the agricultural labor force in the Middle East and North Africa region. In Egypt, women comprise 36% of the labor force with men contributing 22%. However, their needs and the challenges they face are often neglected in project planning, implementation, and evaluation processes due to gender biases which have developed over a long period of time.

Water reuse requires strict adherence to set rules and regulations to ensure its safe use with minimal negative implications. These rules should be clearly and effectively communicated to all men and women users. Gender mainstreaming is thus very important to ensure equitable access to information.

Water reuse is a sensitive issue in many countries. This is partly attributed to cultural and religious concerns, but also due to a lack of information about its safety for use. The more informed the users are, the better they will be equipped to manage risks. This is especially true for women who tend to have less access than men to technical information . However, it is unclear what role women play in water reuse and how they are affected, and several issues can be combined making it difficult to understand.

Gender mainstreaming in a water reuse project cycle

Water reuse project teams can assess gender using four approaches presented in the form of questions that need to be addressed before moving into further guiding questions along the project cycle:

- How are the targeted measures aiming at ensuring, or at least increasing, participation of women in different water reuse programs?
- What are the integrated measures with focus on structures and systems that systematically reduce the gender gap and empower women within water reuse?
- What are the policy dialogue opportunities and challenges for men and for women to participate, lead, manage and benefit from water reuse investments?
- How are gender disparities and differences included as part of the applied methodology?

Gendered employment opportunities

Water reuse depends on investments that create alternative uses for different qualities of water. This in turn creates new employment opportunities for men and women. Project managers can use various approaches to increase women's employment within the water reuse projects such as irrigated agriculture and in the wastewater treatment plants.

Water and sanitation utilities are often top-down entities which see themselves as offering an essential service based on their expertise. The business environment is shifting with the need to see citizens as customers whose needs must be addressed. Women comprise just over half of the global population, so they must not only be consulted, but they need to be represented as employees at different levels of the service providers tiers and contribute to decision-making.

Studies have noted that the inclusion of women in the design, operation, and maintenance of water and sanitation facilities can result in positive outcomes at different levels. Water and sanitation service providers will benefit from an increased pool of talents with a potential of diversified inputs for more efficient and effective service provision to intended customers.

Currently, the low participation of women in water services is due to discrimination against women employment at four stages: attraction, recruitment, retention, and advancement. Removing these barriers is critical to provide equal opportunities for women.

Gender mainstreaming in water reuse project cycle

Recommendations

Gender mainstreaming will positively impact the men, women, and children who will benefit from socially inclusive water reuse interventions. There are many opportunities for mainstreaming gender within the generic water reuse sector in the context of a project cycle.

Gender should be assessed using approaches that address the targeted measures, integrated measures, policy dialogue opportunities and gender disparities. Women should play a greater role in water reuse by making up a greater percentage of the labor force in the water services fields.

Gender mainstreaming is a good start, but the aim is a gender transformative approach, which addresses the root causes of gender inequality by challenging and changing norms and values while reconfiguring power relationships. Ultimately, a transformative agenda will be developed to change social, cultural, economic, institutional, financial, political structures and enhance the ability of women and girls to become influential actors in the water reuse project cycle.

Key source and further reading: Mapedza E, Dessalegn B, Abdelali-Martini M, Al Hariry H (forthcoming). Gender mainstreaming guidelines. International Water Management Institute, Colombo

For more information about the ReWaterMENA project, visit: https://rewater-mena.iwmi.org/ or **contact:** Javier Mateo-Sagasta, ReWaterMENA project leader (J.Mateo-Sagasta@cgiar.org)

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RESEARCH PROGRAM ON Water, Land and Ecosystems

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