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Panel on

Water, Women and Conflict

A View from the Field

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Approach to Water-Related Conflicts

Major issues in Water, Women and Conflict

- Sources of conflict
- Conflict arising from war, disaster, water scarcity, competition
- Cultural dynamics
- Human rights and governance issues
- Gender equity



Key issue seen by water development organizations

- Violence against women carrying out water-related activities in conflict-affected areas.



Field Perspective

- Women (and young girls) have the primary responsibility for water management in most households.
- The collection and use of water often places women in situations where the risk of violence is high.
- Women are particularly vulnerable when the cultural and societal norms are disrupted.
- The effects of conflict related to water can be physical, emotional and economic.
- They affect not only women and those with water responsibilities but eventually everyone in the community.
- Violence against women has cascading effects on the household and the community.

Why are Women More Vulnerable?

- Long distances
- Insecure areas
- No personal protection
- Infrastructure designs not consider women
- Women's responsibilities
- Collection occurs at high risk times
- Few societal controls during conflicts
- Male community leaders not concerned
- Rape is used as a weapon of war



Impacts of Water-Related Conflicts on Women

primary

- Impacts on women water carriers



secondary

- Impacts on households



tertiary

- Impacts on the community



Impacts on Women Water Carriers

Water-related activities

- Water collection
- Defecation/urination
- Bathing
- Clothes washing
- Cultivating fields
- Home gardens
- Livestock



Impact

- Rape
- Kidnap
- Fear
- Choice of safer site with poorer water
- Injury from water loads
- Reduced water consumption

Impacts on Households



Effects on household

- Less water used
- Water quality from alternate sources is unsafe
- Less time available for domestic activities
- Young girls required to carry water from distant sources
- Reduced crop production
- Reduced family income

Impact

- Personal and family hygiene deteriorates
- Increase in diarrheal and other water-related diseases
- Family cohesion suffers
- Girls do not attend school
- Fewer cash crops for market
- Family becomes more economically insecure
- Poverty forces women to take risks

Impacts on Communities

Effects on community

- Fear of violence affects decisions (water sources, no. of trips, urination and defecation, livelihood activities)
- Economic activity declines
- Community income decreases

Impact

- Social and emotional conditions decline
- Community becomes economically insecure
- Poverty grows



Programming Responses and Mitigations

- Establishment of working groups on child protection and on gender.
- Protection/Gender advisors posted to humanitarian crises (Sudan/Darfur, DRC/Kivu, Haiti/earthquake).
- Development of a gender lens.
- Training of field staff in gender, protection and peacebuilding.
- Greater gender sensitivity and awareness of conflicts:
 - Afghanistan – IWRM and watershed programming
 - DRC/N. Kivu – plan water points that increase access and enhance protection
 - E. Chad/refugee camps – advise local partner to place water points which increase access and enhance protection
 - Sudan/Darfur - separate wells for farmers and herders; water committees including women
- Empowerment of women through education, economic opportunities and involvement in management and leadership



Research Needs



- Improved procedures to identify and assess conflicts around water points.
- General guidelines on women and conflict for WASH program managers.
- Institutionalize knowledge on the protection of women in all development sectors, especially water.
- Development of gender analyses and frameworks for action that do not exacerbate problems for women and girls.