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2015: CLIMATE CHANGE CHALLENGES UNIQUE TO **WOMEN AND WATER**

WATER SCARCITY IS MORE ADVERSELY FELT BY WOMEN THAN MEN. IN THE AFTERMATH OF A DISASTER, THIS IS OFTEN MORE PRONOUNCED.

Enerref Institute's Women and Water initiative seeks to develop workable, immediate and site-specific solutions to the issue of water and the gendered roles associated with it. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, access to a clean and reliable source

of water is one of the key priorities for survivors. However and as this report will explore, women and girls are often faced with greater challenges in securing such a resource than those of men and boys.

WOMEN AND WATER

THE ISSUE OF GENDER AND WATER IS WELL-ESTABLISHED

Women and girls, particularly within a developing nation context are often tasked with collection of water for the family's daily use. This is often the case in areas where water isn't readily available through traditional methods (village wells, taps, localized streams/ rivers). In fact research carried out by various NGO's and aid donors has found that this chore often sees women and girls being made to walk up to 8 hours a day carrying up to 40kg of water.

However, it's not just the collection of water that has a distinctly gendered impact. Health, sanitation, location of water sources and the economic uses of water are often more adversely felt by women than men.

HEALTH

Drinking water collected from unsafe sources has been shown to impact women and children at a higher level than men. Research remains critical to understanding the reason for this but it has been suggested that women and children often have a higher level of contact with polluted water during the collection, bathing and consumption.

SANITATION

Using water for sanitary purposes is often less available to those experiencing extreme poverty and that has regularly been shown to include a majority of women and girls. However, sanitation and its related uses also raise additional risks for a community's female population. Cultural barriers regarding menstrual cycles mean that many women and girls are unable to dispose of (or adequately clean in the case of towels) pads or tampons. There is also the risk of sexual assault when, due to the lack of sex-separated facilities, girls and women seek privacy to defecate or urinate.

LOCATION OF WATER COLLECTION FACILITIES

Women and girls will often have a lesser degree of social mobility or influence in their communities. This will often mean decisions on where to collect water, situate a pump or build sanitation facilities are taken by men. This can lead to the collection point of facilities being situated in areas that are considerable distances from the community, in dangerous areas or in terms of sanitation facilities are mixed sex.

ECONOMIC IMPACT

Quality and availability of water has economic benefits in a com-

munity. The quality of the water during cooking, cleaning and sanitation can reduce the impact of infections and disease and as such, reduce the number of instances of men and women being unable to participate in day-to-day life due to illness. The availability of water impacts on the education and economic activities of the community also. The closer a water source to a community, the less time collecting it and the more time can be spent carrying out other vital roles.

“Water is life's mater and matrix, mother and medium. There is no life without water.” Nobel Peace winner, Albert Szent-Gyorgyi.

WATER AND EMERGENCY SITUATIONS A GENDER-NEUTRAL APPROACH

ENSURING EQUAL, GENDER-NEUTRAL ACCESS TO WATER IN THE AFTERMATH OF A DISASTER IS A KEY PRIORITY OF THE ENEREF INSTITUTE.

VERY LITTLE OF THE PLANETS VAST RESERVE OF WATER IS AVAILABLE FOR USE AND CONSUMPTION

This planet has an incredible amount of water. In fact, 71% of the planet's surface is water which equates to 315 million cubic miles. Simply put, there's an abundance of H₂O. However, when taking a more considered look at the amount of water safe for consumption, these vast numbers are reduced dramatically. Of the total amount of water on the planet, only 2.5% is drinkable (the rest being either salt water or a mixture of salt water & fresh water known as brackish) and of that amount only 0.007% is directly accessible for human consumption.

Furthermore, when you include other issues surrounding water abstraction and consumption (geopolitical tensions, cultural boundaries, sustainability and other socio-economic factors) the fact is, despite the earth having plentiful supplies of H₂O, there is a finite amount of water to provide basic needs for an ever growing global population.

WATER SCARCITY

In terms of accessing the world's water, there are often significant challenges to be faced. Despite the majority of the developed world having relatively sustainable and secure access, large parts of the developing world's access is less secure. A considerable portion of the earth suffer from water scarcity and will be suffering from a severe physical shortage of water or from the equally challenging economic water scarcity.

Note: About 1.1 billion people are living in conditions classed as 'water scarce' and almost all of those are within developing nations, with the majority being within the sub-Saharan Africa region..

WOMEN AND GIRLS FACE A GREATER LEVEL OF VULNERABILITY IN ACCESSING CLEAN WATER

Within that over-arching figure, there are subsets who will traditionally face greater obstacles in obtaining easy access to clean water. Age, ethnicity, religion and cultural factors impact on an individual or communities ac-

cess to a water source. However, one group in particular includes all of those subsets from birth. Numerous studies have shown that women and girls will be subjected to the difficulties that all experience based on their age, religion, cultural background and social status. Women and girls will therefore be more vulnerable to water scarcity and access to clean, potable water because of their gender alone.

With this in mind, Eneref has set up an initiative to look at the issues surrounding access to clean for all. With a particular focus on women and girls, the initiative aims to address some of the most frequently cited obstacles in providing clean, potable water to women and girls on a sustainable basis. Working with private sector organizations, government agencies, NGOs and international aid donors, the 'Women and Water initiative will aim to develop workable, immediate and site-specific practical and policy solutions to the issue of water and related gendered roles.

ENEREF INSTITUTE RECOGNIZES FIVE CHALLENGES TO ADDRESSING THE PROBLEM OF ENSURING | GENDER EQUAL ACCESS TO WATER.

Eneref Institute has identified five challenges that are key to ensuring safe, reliable access to clean water for all in the aftermath of a disaster.

1. Safe, Localized Collection

Despite women and girls increased vulnerability in accessing clean water, the role of collecting water is largely left to women and girls (although some studies have shown young boys also collecting water). These daily journeys can take anything up to 8 hours from a women or girls day, meaning additional pressure on other responsibilities they may have.

2. Consumption of Dirty Water

Drinking water collected from unsafe sources has been shown to impact women and children at a higher level than men. Theories suggest this may be because of the role of care-giver often associated with women and girls in water-scarce communities and that women and children often have a higher level of contact with polluted water during the collection, bathing (children particularly) and consumption.

3. Lack of Access to Clean, Safe Sanitation Facility

The use of water for sanitary purposes is often considered a taboo subject within a community. However, sanitation for women

and girls raises additional risks for a community's female population. Cultural issues regarding menstrual cycles mean that many women and girls are unable to dispose of (or adequately clean in the case of towels) pads or tampons which increases the risk of infection and disease. Add to that documented cases of sexual assault (the changing of menstrual aids is often done in areas outside of a community and in secluded areas) when girls and women seek privacy.

4. Inclusive Decision Making

Considering the sensitivities discussed in the paragraph on sanitation, the location of a water source and sanitary facilities, women and girls will often have a great need to input in the decisions of the community when it comes to new facilities. However, because women and girls often have a lower degree of influence in their communities, this is often not the case meaning decisions on where to collect water, situate a pump or build sanitation facilities are taken by men. This can lead to the collection point of facilities being situated in areas

that are considerable distances from the community, in dangerous areas or in terms of sanitation facilities are mixed sex.

5. Addressing The Economic Impact of Water

Quality and availability of water has economic benefits in a community. Using dirty, poor quality water for cooking, personal hygiene and sanitation can increase the frequency and severity of infections and disease. This can increase fatality rates and the number of instances when community members are unable to participate in day-to-day life & contribute to the economic day-to-day activities due to illness. The location of a water source can impact on the economic viability of a community also. Water sources that are a long distance from the community mean a longer period of time used to collect it. This impedes on the other roles and responsibilities of women within that community and often stops girls from receiving the same level of education as boys.

COMMUNICATIONS AND GENDER

Physical Scarcity:

Physical scarcity, as the phrase suggests, relates to the physical lack of water. This is often caused by drought and other climate-based events outside the normal cycle of dry/ wet seasons. There is some evidence to suggest that the changing climate is increasing the severity and frequency of physical water scarcity and the trend of long periods without precipitation in certain areas of the world will intensify.

Economic Scarcity:

Economic scarcity is more complex and is found in large parts of sub-Saharan Africa. This term usually relates to the economic barriers found in developing sufficient infrastructure to maintain a sustainable and long-lasting source of water.

Note: Whilst each is often viewed separately, they are not mutually exclusive and are often found in the same areas:

INEFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION COSTS LIVES

The Women and Water initiative has been designed as part of a wider policy drive at the Eneref Institute to assist and inform those in charge of designing, implementing and maintaining emergency management plans and related communication strategies.

The area of gender and emergency communication is only just being understood. However, the impacts of this field has the potential to radically alter the effectiveness of communication and information strategies during a disaster event.

EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

Whilst it is widely understood that a person's gender has an impact on how they view and react to a risky situation, the importance of these differences has yet to manifest in most plans and strategies.

During a disaster or emergency situation, communication by the relevant authorities is vital to ensure instructions and information are spread as quickly and effectively as possible. Targeting communication strategies based on age, location and socio-economic

factors are already widely used to ensure a greater visibility within the affected population. However, including the role of gender in emergency communication has been less widely used. This lack of inclusion is normally due to the lack of planning before the disaster occurs. Eneref Institute is determined to correct this omission with actionable strategies for emergency planners and communicators.

COSTS REDUCTION OPPORTUNITY

With the costs (both monetary and in terms of fatalities/ injuries) of disasters climbing at an exponential rate, Eneref Institute view this as an opportunity to ensure the widest possible number of people are able to use this information in order to avoid the risk altogether or at the very least, have the information and resources to minimise their exposure. Including a gendered aspect to the communication strategy will allow messages to be formatted in ways that address the current situation where women and girls are 14 times more likely to die or be injured than men and boys.

Research and reporting compiled and provided by Eneref Institute. (www.eneref.org)

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