



nile basin discourse

one Nile, one family

Fact Sheet on

Gender Mainstreaming in Nile Basin

Background

The River Nile Basin, in which the longest river Nile worldwide (runs over 6,671 kilometers) is found, represents 10.3% of the area of the African continent. It is shared between ten riparian countries namely; Burundi, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda, Egypt and Sudan. South Sudan will soon be the eleventh officially sharing the Nile resources.

Women are an important resource in all the Nile basin countries. Women make up over 52% of the Nile Basin countries' population and yet, more often than not, they are left out of the Nile Basin Initiative programmes. Therefore, they should be more included not only in the benefits of programming but also in decision-making for NBI as an organization. The Millennium Declaration of 2000 resolves to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women as effective ways to combating poverty, hunger and disease and to stimulate sustainable development.

Acknowledgement of the role of women in the management and development of water resources can be traced to the International Drinking Water Supply and Sanitation Decade (IDWSSD) 1980-1990 (also known as the Water Decade) proclaimed on November 10, 1980, which provides a framework for a massive effort to bring safe water to half of the world's population, (Vijita, 1996). The special relationship between women and water was emphasized when the UN General Assembly reaffirmed Resolution 25 adopted by the 1980 World Conference of the UN Decade for Women, which recommended the promotion of the goals of the Water Decade at all levels (IWTC, 1990). The Resolution advocates the full promotion of women in water supply, planning, implementation, and technology. It offered an opportunity for Nile Basin countries to involve women in setting its goals. This was reinforced in 1992 when the UNDP and World Bank's Water and Sanitation Programme adopted the Dublin Rio Principles. The principles advocate for a holistic management of water as an essential finite resource of socio-economic value. They stress that the water resources should be managed in a participatory way and at the lowest appropriate level, with women playing a pivotal role in water projects since they are the main providers and users of water.

There have been some notable attempts to integrate gender in the NBI. In September 2007, the CIDA-funded Gender Equality and African Regional Institution Project (GEARI) carried out an assessment to establish the extent of gender mainstreaming at NBI and its associated institutions. A report on the same was produced in March 2008. As a result of the assessment, a gender equality action plan was developed and some parts of the action plan were implemented: the establishment of a gender working group that met regularly; a draft NBI gender policy and strategy was formulated; and a gender mainstreaming training for staff of NBI and its organs was conducted.

Water is probably the most vital natural resource. The bonds between people and water are primal and have a long history that spans both ancient and contemporary cultures. Bonds with water reflect the cultural values and social differences embedded in societies including gender differences. In many cases, gender discrimination can limit the women's and men's chances to access vital water resources, by placing restriction in their autonomy. Attitudes such as, "Women should – or should not – do this and that" or "Men are supposed to do this –but not that", may prevent either women or men action regarding water use, access or management. These practices often result in unfair and self-perpetuating impacts on the lives of both women and men as it reduces the benefits of development among disadvantaged groups and marginalizes their contribution to society—"no water, no wealth, no well-being".

The NBI countries have been profiled with baseline data indicating their water and land area, demographics, economic overview, policies on water and environmental issues among others. The table below shows selected indicators of women empowerment among the 10 NBI countries. It is noteworthy that disaggregated data is not always readily available for comparisons to be made.

Country	Gender Related Dev. Index (GDI)	Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM)	Gender Inequality in Economic Activity (Index)	Women in Government at Ministerial level (2005) (% of total)
Burundi	0.380	-	101	10.7
Democratic Republic of Congo	0.378	-	101	12.5
Egypt	-	0.262	76	5.9
Eritrea	-	-	95	17.6
Ethiopia	-	-	98	5.9
Kenya	0.487	-	93	10.3
Rwanda	0.449	-	94	35.7
Sudan	-	-	-	2.6
Tanzania,	0.426	0.597	97	15.4
Uganda	-	-	99	23.4

Source: UNDP Human Development Report, 2006

Problem

Currently, although women play a critical role in African Countries day-to-day activities, their participation at the political and organizational levels is not efficiently represented, which threatens effective representation of their practical and gender needs. For example, in water resources management, a fact well recognized by the national and regional water policy frameworks, women's role is often overlooked at the decision-making and planning stages, and they do not have equal access to benefits. Accordingly, mainstreaming gender is a step towards not only addressing this fact but also for enabling NBI to achieve its shared vision as well as to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development, through the equitable utilization of, and benefit from, the common Nile Basin water resources. Therefore, involvement and participation of both women and men is crucial at the planning and implementation stages.

NBD through its network members has done significant work on gender mainstreaming within the basin. However, NBD has not coordinated the efforts of the gender based civil society organizations so as to ensure that gender mainstreaming is effectively mainstreamed within the basin. In June 2011, NBD had a meeting of gender based organizations in the entire Nile Basin in Entebbe, Uganda. It is upon the basis of the meeting that a report was produced and the contents shared in with NBI during a recent NBI gender working group meeting held in June 2011, to help shape the future work mainstreaming gender in the Nile Basin.

There has been little past interventions of gender mainstreaming in the Nile Basin. However, NBD has now realized that its interventions, NBI's and all other actors' interventions in the Nile Basin will not be sustainable if gender is not mainstreamed in Nile Basin programmes and processes. It is on this premise that NBD commissioned a research in June 2011 on the state of Gender Mainstreaming in the Basin. The research yielded very little information, which signifies that no substantive research has been undertaken on the issues that have an impact on women and men within the Nile Basin trans-boundary water resources management and development arena. The report highlighted the fact that work on water management is on the increase, but the area of gender and the role that women play in water management has been neglected and gender issues have received little attention to ensure that planned and ongoing water resources management and development programs continuously mainstream gender at all levels.

Additionally, there is recognition that each member country has varying practical and strategic gender needs and demands upon the shared Nile resource in the presence of uncoordinated individual country programmes. This easily results into inequitable resource and benefit sharing by the member states thereby creating tension and possible escalation of conflicts.

Role of Women Groups

Since women are an important resource in all the Nile basin countries, there is a need to empower them at all levels. When women groups (formal and informal) are well organized, they become power bases. They can therefore help with constructing the social structures necessary for accessing the community. They are the key entry into the power structures of a community, and have the knowledge and intelligence required to work with the entire community, especially the men.



Future perspectives:

Gender mainstreaming is recognized as a serious issue at the regional level by the NBD. Therefore, NBD can play an important role within gender mainstreaming activities in the Nile Basin Countries which include:

- Assisting the region states to adopt the NBI gender policy, in order to facilitate and guide the gender mainstreaming activities in the region.
- Enhancing the capacity of women based organizations in the region.
- Enhancing the institutional capacities for gender mainstreaming through strengthening the Gender Units and Departments to be scaled up within the existing institutions in the region.

Meanwhile, the governments of Nile Basin countries should enhance the following immediate steps towards realizing gender mainstreaming goals, which include:

- Enhancing the participation of women in the policy planning and management of the Nile Basin resources right from the start, to ensure that the practical and strategic gender needs are well addressed and thus are efficiently met.
- Applying Gender-sensitive monitoring and evaluation indicators towards achieving gender-related goals. The monitoring and evaluation processes should also involve women and men and ensure each one's views are taken on board to inform the decision making process.
- Promoting and supporting the women groups and their role in development.



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