MEXICO

GENDER MAINSTREAMING TO ESTABLISH EFFECTIVE AND DEMOCRATIC WATER AND SANITATION MANAGEMENT

Joint Programme: Establishing Effective and Democratic Water and Sanitation Management in Mexico to Support the Achievement of the MDGs

Thematic Window: Democratic Economic Governance

Main Participants: ECLAC, FAO, UNIDO, UN-Habitat, PAHO, UNESCO, UNODC, UNDP; Veracruz Women’s Institute, Veracruz Institute for Public, Tabasco Water and Sanitation Commission, Chiapas Water Institute, Chiapas Civil Protection Unit, Chiapas Institute for Public Information
1. Introduction

The Joint Programme on Establishing Effective and Democratic Water and Sanitation Management in Mexico to Support the Achievement of the MDGs (the Programme) aimed to improve the integrated management of water in peri-urban and rural areas of Mexico to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with regard to water and sanitation (W&S), and to combat poverty from the standpoint of environmental sustainability and gender equality. The Programme adopted a gender mainstreaming strategy focused on the institutionalization of gender units in key water-related public institutions and the promotion of women and civil society involvement in water management. It has led to increased democratic water governance, transparency and participation of civil society in the integral management of W&S, with special emphasis on women’s participation.

2. Initial Situation

Mexico is reaching the overall MDG goal related to water access (89 per cent of population), yet there is still a large share of population that has no access to this resource in the quality and quantity necessary. In rural areas, especially in indigenous communities, there are thousands of marginalized and isolated localities with almost five million Mexicans not having access to water at all. Additionally, rapid urbanization in the main cities of Mexico is causing informal settlements with difficult access, no services and infrastructure and exposed to hydro-meteorological risks.

In Mexico, municipalities are the entities responsible for water access. However, their management and financial capacities are very weak, especially in poor areas. Furthermore, most institutions in charge of water access place a strong emphasis on infrastructure development, paying less attention to social participation issues.

Progressive realization of access to safe and affordable water for all is crucial for poverty eradication, women’s empowerment and the protection of human health. Reduced time, health, and caregiving burdens from improved water services give women more time for productive endeavours, adult education, empowerment activities and leisure. However, water resource use and management is highly gendered in Mexican society. While women are mostly responsible for domestic and community water, sometimes carrying the water for several kilometers, most water-related rights and decision-making are conferred to men. The Programme was put in place to improve population access to water, while increasing women’s participation in water management and mainstreaming gender in water-related policies and institutions.

3. Objectives

The Programme aimed at improving the integrated management of water in peri-urban and rural areas of Mexico, from the standpoint of environmental sustainability and gender equality. The Programme focused in three states in the south of the country: Chiapas, Tabasco and Veracruz, characterized by high levels of social and economic deprivation, a significant proportion of indigenous population and high vulnerability to weather phenomena.

4. Key Actors

The Programme was implemented by eight UN Agencies: ECLAC, FAO, UNIDO, UN-Habitat, PAHO, UNESCO, UNODC and UNDP.

Strategic alliances were established with water institutions, gender institutes, civil protection units and institutes for public information at state level.

Civil society organizations, indigenous representatives, women groups and networks were active contributors to the process.

5. Strategy

The Programme adopted a dual gender strategy: on one side, a gender mainstreaming approach aimed at integrating a gender perspective in all Programme actions and, on the other side and simultaneously, specific interventions focused on women’s empowerment and gender equality. Following are the three main axes of intervention:
Gender-Sensitive Diagnostics on Water Management

The elaboration of the diagnostics followed a participatory approach that included: five workshops per state (for a total of 356 participants), 266 interviews with key informants and 139 questionnaires.

Workshops were based on the methodology proposed by the Women’s Blue Agenda, developed and applied by the Gender and Environment Network since 2006. The aim was to identify women’s and men’s needs and challenges related to water access and management, from a gender and ethnic perspective.

Institutionalization of Gender Mainstreaming in Water-Related Public Policies and Institutions

The institutions in charge of gender issues in the three states were sensitized and strengthened to extend their mandates to environmental issues, such as water and disaster management. At the same time, sector institutions responsible for water management, access to public information and civil protection were provided with technical assistance and training to integrate gender and intercultural approaches into their work.

The Programme promoted citizen’s involvement in water management. Several tools were developed to sensitize and train civil society organizations on social participation and transparency, including the Citizens’ Guide to Inclusive Participation in Water Management and the With Information All Win – A Guide to Know Your Right.

Women’s Participation in Water Management

In several rural localities, local committees for water disinfection management were created and household based safe water systems were installed. Each process of installation was accompanied by a comprehensive strategy to foster women’s participation in the management of the system.

6. Progress and Results

Gender-Sensitive Diagnostics on Water Management

Three participatory diagnostics, one per state, were published under the title Water and Development: Local Agenda for Gender Equality. The diagnostics offer targeted and meaningful information on the issues of water, sanitation, gender and ethnicity in the three states. They present sex-disaggregated data on water situation in urban and rural areas, their availability, their uses and the vulnerability and hydro meteorological hazards. They also include information on women’s political involvement, economic and labour market participation, maternal mortality, health, education and gender-based violence.

These diagnostics came to fill the previous gap on disaggregated data and analysis related to water access in marginalized communities. They have been used to support evidence-based advocacy action, as well as basis for the design and implementation of the Programme interventions in the communities.

Institutionalization of Gender Mainstreaming in Water-Related Policies and Institutions

Gender issues have been effectively integrated into the agenda, policies, strategies and plans of key sector institutions. Some of the main achievements are:

- The Veracruz Women’s Institute has increased its budget dedicated to water management issues.
- The Tabasco Water and Sanitation Commission has created a permanent gender focal point position and has regulated gender parity in local water management units (UDESAS).
- In Chiapas, gender areas have been created in both the Water Institute and the Civil Protection Unit.
- The Institute for Public Information in Chiapas is replicating the methodologies developed to promote women and indigenous participation in 23 municipalities of the state.
Women’s Participation in Water Management

Several safe water systems ("water kiosks" and household based systems) were deployed in a number of rural communities of the states of Tabasco, Chiapas and Veracruz. These innovative facilities, for their simplicity and low maintenance, are a good example of sustainable solutions that are easily manageable by the community.

A local committee manages each safe water system. At present, women are the majority in these committees. Some of the water systems have become local microenterprises. Their impact on women’s economic empowerment is still to be analysed.

In Sitalá, in the state of Chiapas, the water system is managed and operated by a group of midwives. Fifteen individual safe water systems have been installed in the midwives’ houses, serving for both domestic and childbirth attending purposes. The systems were installed in collaboration with the Comprehensive Services Clinic -part of the Sanitary Jurisdiction of Ocosingo and Casa Materna. Thanks to the safe water systems, midwives no longer have to invest time and energy in fetching water. Additionally, the need for wood to boil water has decreased significantly, meaning less time, effort and respiratory complications. Midwives are coordinated with local authorities, which is a key factor for sustainability.

7. Lessons Learned and Challenges

- Gender analysis is an essential tool. Differences and inequalities between women and men influence how they perceive and participate in water use and management. Understanding gender roles, relations and inequalities can help explain the choices women and men make and their different options.
- Community involvement is essential for the sustainability of the services and investments done in the water management sector, as well as to trigger behavioral changes in relation to water use and conservation.
- Community representation is always an issue. The term ‘community’ is often used as if it represents a homogenous, clear and defined structure. In actual fact it conceals a range of vested interests in terms of economic position, ethnic status, gender balance and age. It is of paramount importance to approach communities considering these complexities and to not fall back on false assumptions. Participatory gender diagnostics revealed differentiated women’s and men’s needs and interests.
- The role of local and regional authorities is essential to provide the required political, financial and practical support to water management local initiatives. While local communities usually perceive the advantages of cooperation, they frequently lack the financial resources, the technical skills, the expertise or the access to the relevant information to reach an agreement and put it into practice.

8. Sustainability and Potential Application

The strategy of sustainability put in place by the Programme is based on the institutionalization of gender units in key water-related public institutions and the promotion of women and civil society involvement in water management, as well as the installation of safe water systems based on appropriate technologies.