



How Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Interventions Empower Women

A study from Ethiopia

Executive Summary

This study shares research on women's experiences of water, sanitation and hygiene, (WASH) initiatives undertaken in 2009 and explores the issue of women's empowerment. The field research was conducted within the Millennium Water Program by CARE Ethiopia in Farta and Estie Woredas of the South Gondar Zone, Amhara region. The researchers used CARE's empowerment model as part of an overall approach of looking at how addressing basic needs and strategic interests through WASH interventions can contribute to women's empowerment. WASH-related questions were addressed through a quantitative snapshot questionnaire filled in by 143 women of different backgrounds, 8 focus group discussions and ten individual interviews. Note: These results only give an indication of patterns observed in this study population and thus provide food for thought rather than accurate measurements of impact which can be extrapolated to other populations.



Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

The findings on changes on women's lives include:

- 74% report at least some increase in **water collected**; 40% report double or more
- 59% report a reduction in **time taken** to fetch water; 26% report a reduction by half or more
- 82% report improvements in **sanitation practices**; 55% report significant changes, i.e. from no latrine to having a latrine
- 85% report some improvement in **hygiene practices**; 62% report significant changes
- No single pattern of findings on time for **socializing/networking**
- Other benefits include an increased regularity of **attendance of girls at school** and a decreased **fear of violence and abduction to and from water collection**, though this remains an area of concern

Empowerment

- Thirty-four percent of women felt significantly more empowered as a result of the intervention whilst 0.7% felt less so, and 8% felt not very different.
- In terms of **changes to equality within the household** 67% felt that there had been improvements but 2% felt that they were more unequal and 21% that the situation was not very different.
- Women's sense of **control over household resources** had improved for 68% and their feelings of increased **respect/dignity** increased for 67%. However, in discussions women explained that changes over control of resources were minimal and not much evidence of time saved being used to improve income or assets.

Factors Affecting Empowerment

The study found the following correlations with **feeling significantly more empowered**:

- Those who reported adoption of a handwashing station near the latrine were 6.62 times more likely to have said they felt significantly more empowered after the intervention
- Those who said they doubled the amount of water they collected following the intervention were 6.48 times more likely to have felt significantly more empowered
- Those who reduced their water fetching time by half or more were 3.19 times more likely to have felt significantly more empowered.

Equality

The findings regarding **feelings about being more equal** were:

- Those who adopted a handwashing station near their latrine were 5.10 times more likely to have reported feeling much more equality in the household.
- Those with greatly increased time for socializing were 4.52 times more likely to have experienced greater equality after the intervention.

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- Those with highly reduced time to water source were 3.62 times more likely to have greater equality.
 - Those who adopted a latrine were 3.35 times more likely to have felt much more equality in their households.
3. Be aware of the heterogeneity of women's experiences. Ensure that a range of women's interest groups are represented
 4. Target income generation-related training and activities at women

Possible correlations with control over household resources were also looked at, but the figures proved to be statistically not relevant, i.e. the dynamics of who controls household resources in this area did not seem to be affected by the WASH intervention.

Most of the key factors examined were significantly associated with a large **increase in feelings about sense of dignity or respect** after the intervention. Interestingly, the time for socializing/networking had the strongest relationship with increased sense of dignity/respect, possibly a reflection of those people who as a consequence of the WASH work have a greater voice in the public sphere, e.g. roles in committees that also provide networking/socializing opportunities.

Heterogeneity of Experiences

In terms of the **heterogeneity** of women's experiences the findings were:

- Surprisingly perhaps, the study did not find any statistically significant differences according to the wealth status of the respondents
- Those that found a role in the WASH intervention as committee members or in income generation opportunities reported the most significant changes to how they felt about themselves and how they were perceived within the society.
- Disabled women are benefiting less than able-bodied women.
- Women with children over five years old, which naturally include women in the highest age group in the study, are perhaps less able to or less eager to embrace changes in empowerment.
- By contrast, married women with children under five are probably for cultural as well as practical reasons more able to build on the practical benefits of the intervention to generate more strategic changes.

Recommendations

The recommendations for future programming are:

1. Ensure female staff are recruited at all levels
2. Ensure female representation in community structures

5. Actively look at opportunities to systematically reverse traditional divisions of labour and community attitudes towards women's capabilities and potential: e.g. training women to be mechanics or in other areas that might be seen traditionally to be men's work
6. Use the opportunity of new sources of water provision and new latrines to make collection of water and latrine cleanliness a shared responsibility, not that of women and girls
7. Address menstrual management explicitly and systematically at school and home as a gender-specific WASH intervention
8. Discuss and address the issue of the personal security of women and girls collecting water
9. Consider explicitly the specific needs of vulnerable groups, e.g. disabled women
10. Find out who is not benefiting from the WASH intervention and discuss with them what their constraints are. Small adjustments could be made to ensure increased levels of access and benefits.
11. Link WASH interventions with other women's empowerment initiatives at community, government and NGO level

Conclusions

According to the research, the WASH intervention in South Gondar has addressed critical basic needs and improved the health and wellbeing of communities in general, and many women and girls more specifically.

It has also provided a window for **gender transformation** as water, hygiene and sanitation are all seen in many societies to centrally involve women. This is missing from some sectors where it can be difficult to bring women to the table. However, projects need to more deliberately address women's concerns, facilitate their empowerment and positively challenge power relations.

The research suggests that WASH projects need to target different categories of women, so as to spread and strengthen both basic and strategic benefits.

The full-length report is available on CARE's Water Wiki page at <http://water.care2share.wikispaces.net>